# INDIAN INTERLUDE

FIRST PUBLISHED MAY 1944

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*Set and printed in India by*
*R Bourdon at Western Printers & Publishers Press*
*15-23, Hamam Street, Fort, Bombay,*
*and Published by C. Murphy, Manager,*
*Thacker & Co., Ltd. Rampart Row, Bombay.*

# INDIAN INTERLUDE

*BY*

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*Price Rs. 6-14*

BOMBAY
THACKER & CO., LTD.
1944

All names and characters in this book are entirely fictitious. If any description of person or place can be fitted to anyone, it is purely by chance. No reference to living persons is intended.

*L. C. B*

# CHAPTER I

THE siren hooted, three dismal blasts; the band on the wharf broke into "Auld Lang Syne", while handkerchiefs waved, and the odd voice or two was heard above the general confusion exhorting "Bertie" to "Keep his pecker up", or "Soon be back again, Ma" in reply from the crowded troopship. The gap between the shore and the ship imperceptibly widened, and soon it was impossible to distinguish individual faces on the wharf. Just a black mass with white spaces here and there.

Robert Kempley, newly gazetted a Second Lieutenant in the Unattached List for the Indian Army, felt no sorrow at leaving England. He was too excited for that. Only twenty, and on his way to India. The name to him was somehow vaguely mysterious. Yet to the rest of the people who surrounded him it probably meant nothing more than going back to the same old round. The Plains till it got too hot, then some Hill Station where some scores of women, whose husbands were down country, quarrelled and fought over the few men present.

His friend, Mark Fegen, who had been through the same Public School and Sandhurst with Bob, turned and said. "Come on, let's get

a drink," so the two of them found their way to the smoke-room, already full, and ordered two small whiskies. There was still an hour before dinner, and the bar was full; there were nearly forty other youngsters on board who also were going out to their first appointment. All were drinking, and very gay.

"I say, Mark, what's a Pink Gin?" asked Bob. "All the older Indian crowd seem to be drinking it."

"I don't know, but let's try it," was the answer, followed by, "waiter, two Pink Gins" - rather self-consciously.

The drinks came and, after adding a little water, were gingerly tasted.

"Bloody!" said Bob, "but we'd better get used to them."

So they carried on till dinner - and were very glad finally to get to bed, as neither felt too well.

The next day there was a fairly heavy swell running, and the two new subalterns went down below to inspect the Troop deck which was in their charge. This was Deck E, on water level, and where on normal passenger vessels cargo only is stored. However, the troop accommodation of the ship was in the former cargo holds, and about eleven hundred men occupied these decks.

The stench was appalling; men were being sick, and there was no room to move. It was near their "dinner" hour, and so the smell of food was added to the general unpleasant atmosphere. Bob and Mark were only too glad to get back on deck.

"My God!" said Bob. "Eleven hundred of the poor beggars stuck down there for three weeks. What'll happen in the Red Sea?"

And so the days passed by, uneventfully enough, and nine days after leaving Southampton they reached their first stop, Port Said, at four in the morning. Immediately all the shops opened again, and the red Neon sign of "Simon Arzt" glowed a welcome. The ship was staying three hours, so officers only were permitted ashore. The troops remained on board, and hung wistfully over the rails watching their luckier fellow passengers disembark. Bob and Mark got away amongst the first batch, and were soon enjoying the feeling of firm land under their feet once more.

Almost immediately they were surrounded by the usual crowd of touts—from "gully-gully" men to those who tried to slip packets of "French" postcards into their pockets. One man was particularly insistent, and would not be driven off—"Remember me, Captain? Macgregor? I know lovely Spanish dancer. Naked belly dancer. Very nice." And so on, ad infinitum.

Bob looked at Mark. They hesitated self-consciously.

"We might as well see it once—anyhow it's an experience."

So, trying at the same time to appear quite at ease, and to comfort their consciences, the two innocents, avoiding each other's eyes, were bundled into a taxi and whisked off to Arab Town. There in a shabby little café, boasting the name of "La Maison D'Or", they watched half a dozen wretched women listlessly go through the whole dreary performance which, culminating in the entrance of two buck niggers, drew at last to its inevitable conclusion.

They were very glad to get back to the ship at last—for neither, though not admitting it as yet, had felt anything but physical nausea at this much-vaunted performance. Though to their fellow travellers, who had not witnessed it, they adopted a slightly patronising air of "Well, one should see all these things once, you know. A pity really that you missed it."

One subaltern was particularly envious—Fabian O'Keefe—a queer youth, Irish, and terribly melodramatic. He was acting all the time. When by himself he would drink lemon squash, but if any one joined his table, he would surreptitiously push the squash out of sight and call out, "waiter—bring me two double whiskies in one glass," and then ask politely what you would drink, adding, "I can't

taste a drink unless its pretty strong—family failing, old boy," etc.

Going through the Suez Canal was an unforgettable experience, and once through there, the Red Sea, and the hot weather was encountered. In the Troop decks the atmosphere was that of an oven, and how the men stood it was more than amazing. Luckily there was a head wind all the way to Aden, and so conditions were not as bad as they might have been.

At Aden no one was allowed ashore, only a few R. A. F. details being landed, and the ship getting away again within two hours.

For five days more the voyage continued in unbroken monotony, and on the sixth afternoon land was sighted. India, and the port of Karachi. The ship tied up at six o'clock, and various military officials of the Embarkation Staff arrived on board to hand out orders, instructions, and the like. Bob and Mark were both destined to be attached for their first year to the same regiment in Ralpur, so found a combined warrant issued to them, and were told their train left next day at five p. m.

They woke early, disembarked, got through the Customs, and sallied forth. It was very hot, and they were in uniform, very self-conscious of their white knees when the sun-tanned limbs of those who had been in India some time were encountered. However, "we will soon be as brown as that," they told each other.

At length they were in the train, and for three days travelled, dirty and dusty, till at last they arrived at Ralpur in the United Provinces, where a lorry awaited them and drove them to their new quarters. Their service in India had begun.

# CHAPTER II

"I want you officers—though only attached to us for a year—to feel you are one of us. To take part in all the Regimental functions, play games, and be a social success." The Colonel of the Royal Loamshire Regiment was speaking to Bob, Mark, and two other attached officers, one Brian Jacobs, the other a *King's Commissioned Indian by name* of Harnarain Singh. "Are you settled in your quarters now?" the Colonel went on, "and quite comfortable?"

They assured him they were.

"Very well, gentlemen. You may go."

Four very stiff, correct salutes, and they went.

It was February, and Ralpur was very gay. The hot weather was still a couple of months off, and so there was no lack of feminine society in the Station. In addition, the "fishing fleet" were present in strength that year—no less than nine unattached females in all. They were having more attention paid them in the short three months they were in Ralpur than in their whole lives at home, for Ralpur in

addition to having two battalions stationed there, had a large number of civilians engaged in various jobs connected with the Mills and Tanneries. These all chased eagerly after the "fleet", and soon Bob, Mark and Brian joined the rest of the impecunious subalterns who, in trying to be a "social success", joined the Club and spent far more than they could afford in entertaining the young ladies.

However it was not long before the true meaning of the Colonel's words was made quite clear. Bob and Mark were popular, and were invited out quite often –too often for the peace of mind of the Loamshire Regiment—and it was soon intimated to them that, though they were "one of us now, you appear to be pushing yourselves forward rather too much, don't you think?" And it was clearly seen that the "attached" must only be "social successes" when it was quite certain that every Loamshire subaltern had had his chance to be invited out first. It gave Bob and Mark food for thought.

The next to offend was the unfortunate Harnarain Singh. His father was a rich Indian lawyer, and gave his son a small Austin car. The Loamshires were furious. (They were called elsewhere in the Province– which enjoyed no small measure of quiet fun at their expense— "The Horsiest Regiment on foot in India.") The Senior Subaltern sent for Harnarain Singh and delivered a very pompous lecture.

"Harnarain Singh, don't you think it would have been better to buy a couple of polo ponies than that car? You know the polo team needs mounts?"

"But I don't play polo, and I intend going into an Infantry regiment, and they don't play either," was the reply.

The Senior Subaltern pondered deeply. "I think you should have thought of the good of the Regiment, Harnarain Singh. It is immaterial whether you play yourself or not and you know we want to do well in the Infantry tournament in Lucknow. I consider you have made a bad start to your year with us."

And this opinion seemed to be shared by the other officers of the Regiment, who soon made it clear that the "attached" were really unwelcome, but useful for any dirty job going, and so had to be made the best of, at any rate for the year they were with them.

However, there were some very good fellows in the Regiment, and on the whole the time passed happily enough. Each Saturday night there was a dance at the Club, and generally the whole station turned up and danced to the music of a Goanese band who played tunes already six months old at home, with great gusto.

It was at one of these dances that Bob and Mark met the Regan sisters. They were very

alike—fair and tall - and it was only much later on that it was discovered they were half-castes, or commonly known as "chi-chi". How they managed to get into the Club was a mystery—but there they were, members.

In the course of the evening Bob learned they both taught at the Railway School where the children of the very large Railway community all attended. They were pleasant enough girls, the Regans, and a close friendship soon sprang up between the four. Bob liked Anne Regan, the younger of the sisters, and as Mark seemed fonder of the elder sister Mary, it was all very convenient.

However, the friendship was broken in a very unpleasant way. One guest night in the Mess, when everyone had drunk just a little too much, the Indian, Harnarain Singh, turned to Mark and said:

"After this, come out with me. I know two rather nice girls it won't cost more than fifteen rupees."

Mark agreed, collected Bob, and the trio set out.

Being a little tight, they fell asleep in the back of the car, and only vaguely realised it had stopped and that Harnarain was saying that he would go in and fix things up. Back he came, and said:

"It's O. K. Come along in."

They tumbled out and followed him into the house. There stood Anne and Mary, with only the thinnest of dressing-gowns draped round them. The surprise was mutual, and Bob and Mark could hardly get out of the house quick enough.

Next day they questioned Harnarain Singh, who told them the two girls only drew a very small salary, and each had had to supplement their earnings the only way they knew how. He himself, it appeared, had been there quite often with other wealthy Indians—the two girls being clever enough never to encourage any Europeans, thereby avoiding—up till then—any member of the Club, in which they moved so respectably, coming to know of their work. This was the end of the quartette, and in fact the Regan girls resigned from the Club—though neither Mark nor Bob told the story, partly as it would have made an excellent "bar" tale, and they liked being laughed at as little as anyone else.

Harnarain Singh himself was not a member of the Club as, although he was a so-called British officer and thereby entitled to join, he was also an Indian and therefore automatically barred. He therefore knew nothing of the comic side of the adventure, and was for some time after quite at a loss to understand what had necessitated the hurried and unceremonious exit from the house—especially as both Mark and Bob agreed the young women were most attractive!

The Club dances went on with the occasional variation of a cabaret included. These cabarets were so bad that it was quite uncomfortable to have to watch the performers—the onlookers feeling ashamed for them. Usually they consisted of very third—or fourth-rate performers who were almost inevitably left stranded before the tour was over, and so either had to be sent back to Europe by their various Consuls, or ended up in the brothels of Calcutta or Bombay.

On Saturday night great excitement was caused as the rumour got around that one of the fishing fleet had landed a catch. No one seemed to know quite who either party was, but much rumour and malicious gossip flew around, to be verified next day. The Senior Subaltern of the Loamshires was engaged to Violet Maunsell-Smythe. This caused great excitement, as she was about the quietest and dullest member of the fleet. However, as the second senior Major's wife remarked pleasantly, "Freddie Highland is so crashing a bore himself, the marriage is bound to be a success."

The happy Freddie threw a cocktail party to celebrate his engagement, to which most of the station appeared to be invited. As usual with free drink to be had, everyone drank far more than he or she needed, and there were many "casualties" as the evening wore on. It was amusing to see that as time passed, caution was thrown to the winds, and the principals in

one or two Station "secret" liaisons, let slip the occasional "darling" or "dearest", to the vociferous delight of those watching, and the fury of the husbands in the case or cases.

The doctor's wife, a plump and attractive little Irish woman, was heard devastatingly clearly in a lull in the conversation.

"Well yes, darling, but that bloody husband of mine's coming too."

Loud and embarrassed conversation arose all round. It was well known she had a young subaltern in tow, and her husband, a poor little specimen, never had the courage to stand up to her, although he knew quite well he was the laughing stock of the Station. He was a pleasant little man on the whole, and generally people liked him and were sorry for him.

The party broke up about ten o'clock, far too late to have dinner, so most people found their way to the Club and had supper of "bangers" and mash, or bacon and eggs. The gramophone was turned on, and people started to dance. It was all very good fun, and Bob and Mark enjoyed the evening.

Bob found himself dancing with a very pretty woman, and learned her name was Ruby King. Her husband was "on tour", a civil servant, and she, it appeared, was very bored and suggested Bob should come round to her place for a last drink after the dance, "and I'll

drive you back to your bungalow afterwards," she added.

They left the Club and drove to her home.

"Be very quiet," she whispered, "or you'll wake the children."

She poured out a stiff drink –Bob felt rather hazy– she looked very lovely and very close to him in the dim light. The room was very dark. He took her in his arms.

The next day, Bob being what was known as somewhat "innocent" in these affairs, was very nervous and apprehensive of meeting Ruby King again. Also, as this was his first adventure of its kind, he was, or imagined himself, already in love with her, and of course bursting to tell Mark all about it.

He did not see Ruby all day, but on wandering into the Club in the evening, met her choosing a book in the Library. He had no idea of what to say, but she greeted him quite naturally.

"Hullo, Bob! Are you going to offer me a drink?"

"I'd love to –let's sit out on the lawn," he suggested.

"The band is playing from six-thirty to eight."

So they sat outside, and talked together when suddenly Ruby said to him:

"This is the last time I sit in this damned Club, thank God!—home to England next Saturday."

Bob was stunned. "I never knew you were going away," he said. "Are you going alone?"

"Yes—and my husband follows in June," she replied. "so we'll have summer at home, and then no more Ralpur. We are transferred to 'Pindi' in autumn."

Bob went back to his bungalow utterly miserable. He felt somehow that now she had no right to go away—that he had some claim on her. Soon he imagined himself very much in love, and deeply wronged—rather a tragic figure, and as such, wrote Ruby a letter which brought back an answer telling him not to be silly and melodramatic. This brought him to his senses, and soon he forgot all about her, except when a little drunk, he repeated the story to Mark, and made himself out to be the tragic figure he imagined.

# CHAPTER III

THE hot weather was coming on rapidly, and all the women and children had left for the hills by May, except for a few Nursing Sisters who were unable to get away and gradually began to show signs of the strain of the great heat.

No one went out after eleven o'clock in the morning, and after that did not emerge again from their bungalows before six, when they took what exercise they could, and then repaired to the Club for the inevitable drinking and gossiping before Mess—the main topic of conversation being when and for how long the hot spell would break or last, and would the monsoon be punctual?

It was, and the rains came in July. Immediately the scorched brown earth was covered in grass, and a new life seemed to be infused into the whole Station.

Now began the Rugger season, and the Loamshires were very eager to do well in the All-India tournament, the finals of which were to be played that year in Madras. Unfortunately, none of their own officers played a good game, but both Bob and Brian Jacobs were

school colours, the latter a "blue" at Sandhurst, and so played in the team. In fact, Brian actually captained it throughout the season till he was injured, when Bob took over from him.

There was one amusing interlude before the Loamshires were knocked out in the semi-finals, and that was when a team of the South-Eastern Railway wrote and asked for a match to be played at a place called Moghal Sarai, a large Railway centre about a day's journey from Ralpur. They offered to put a coach at the team's disposal for the week-end, and to entertain them royally after the match with a "grand whist-drive and dance" at the Local Institute Hall. It meant a pleasant break for the team, and the invitation was gladly accepted.

The match was very one-sided, the Railway team being very light and lacking in practice, but it was a pleasant game and everyone looked forward to the evening's entertainment—the whist-drive and dance. Bob was a bit nervous of how his men would behave however, as he noticed some of the Anglo-Indian ladies watching the match were distinctly attractive, and if his team were given too many free drinks, they might make no bones about making it clear they found the ladies attractive also. However, he offered up a silent prayer, and went back to his compartment in the coach to bath and change.

The whist-drive started at eight and went on till ten o'clock. Till then all was well, and

the visitors seemed popular with their hosts and hostesses. The floor was then cleared, tables removed, and chairs placed all round the wall, while the band of six players filed in and took their places on a platform at the end of the room.

At this moment a man in full evening dress approached Bob, who felt very out of place in his dinner jacket, and introduced himself.

"I am the M. C.," he said, in his rather high and clipped 'chi-chi' manner of speaking. "You are the Lieutenant, are you not?"

Bob replied he was, and what an enjoyable evening he and his men were having.

The M.C. or Master of Ceremonies as he turned out to be, then said: "Come into the bar, Lieutenant. We will have a drink together. I know you Army officers like your chota pegs. Ha, Ha!"

They repaired to the bar where for the next half hour the M. C. apologised for everything he had to offer—the whisky, the poor quality of the whist-drive, the bad hall and floor for dancing, the band. In fact he assured Bob that he only came through a sense of duty, and rather felt he must make it clear that he was a cut above these Anglo-Indian revellers. Bob felt uncomfortable and wished he would stop.

Just then Corporal Heywood, a member of the Rugger team, came into the bar and approaching Bob, said:

"Excuse me, Sir, but may I 'ave a word with you?" and, drawing Bob aside, continued: "None of these 'ere women will dance with us, Sir, and us chaps are getting pretty fed up with this dance."

Bob told his friend the M. C. of this state of affairs. He was not at all surprised, and explained: "Oh well, Lieutenant, you must understand, your men have not been introduced to the ladies. No wonder they will not dance."

Bob pointed out that the team had been invited here to dance, that naturally they knew no one, so how could they be introduced? and what did he, the M. C, propose to do about it?

The M. C. pondered—a great thought. "I will announce that introductions can be waived tonight," he beamed, "then everything will be quite proper and correct."

This was evidently the solution, for soon the fair 'chi-chi' girls were dancing with obvious enjoyment with the troops, watched approvingly by the grim chaperons seated round the walls. Evidently the social laws of etiquette were rigorously observed by the Anglo-Indian society of Moghal Sarai!

However, the evening was a great success, and the men thoroughly enjoyed themselves, being given a wonderful time by everyone, and when the time came to go, Bob had quite a lot of difficulty collecting his flock, everyone of

which showed a marked reluctance to say "good-bye". It had been a very cheery party, and they left Moghal Sarai with very happy memories of a most enjoyable week-end.

After this break the monotony of Ralpur got on everyone's nerves, and combined with the muggy heat of the weeks after the monsoon had ended, made tempers short, with one or two people going down with malaria or sandfly fever. Bob was an early victim, and was in hospital nearly three weeks.

On coming out he was recommended by the M. O. for ten days' sick leave, which was granted. The only drawback was that he knew of nowhere to go, and being alone, he thought, was not much fun. If only Brian or Mark could wangle it too, but this was unlikely, as attached officers were not entitled to any leave. However, Brian tried his luck, and to his great delight, and envy of Mark, got his leave, and next day the two set off—bound for Naini Tal, 8000 feet up in the Kumaon Hills.

# CHAPTER IV

THEY journeyed all night, changed trains the next morning, and arrived at Bareilly about tea-time. From there a narrow gauge railway ran as far as Kathgodam at the foot of the hills, the remainder of the journey having to be made by car. As the Kathgodam train was not leaving till early the next morning, Bob and Brian went off in search of rooms, and found a small hotel near the station which was reasonably cheap.

Early next morning they caught the train and, leaving their kit in their compartment with a bearer to look after it, they went and sat in the restaurant car and ordered breakfast.

The train was running through jungle most of the time, but even when crossing the open plain, the hills could not be seen as there was a thin drizzle which, combined with mist, made it impossible to see far. However, it cleared up a little by about eleven o'clock and they saw the foothills very close, with the higher mountains towering behind them, with now and again a glimpse of the snows far beyond. It was a wonderful sight, seemingly even more so in contrast with the last eight months of

heat and dust in the featureless plains of the United Provinces.

The sun was shining when the train reached Kathgodam, and the tumbling waters of a stream nearby made countless rainbows, while the hills covered in pines glistened in the light.

There were several cars for hire, and picking a large tourer, Brian and Bob started. For the first few miles the road led them through thick forest, and nothing very much could be seen, but soon they started climbing and at every turn the views became more wonderful the higher they reached, and soon they were looking down on the plains from eight thousand feet above.

On reaching Naini the car had to be left—only the Governor being allowed that privilege as the little twisting mountain roads could never hold much wheeled traffic—and the last mile of the journey to the little hotel was made in sedan chairs, or "dandies" as they were called. These were carried by four coolies who negotiated the steep hill at astonishing speed.

It was pouring with rain once more, so it was difficult to see very much, especially as a thick mist had again fallen over the countryside, but Bob could see they were passing a lake, and then a large public taxi stand it looked like, but was full of ponies. He found

these were for hire—"tats" they were called—and people used them as they would a bus at home. But no matter how used he got to this idea, it never failed to amuse him to see a stout, middle-aged lady in skirts sitting astride a "tat" with umbrella over her, solemnly doing her shopping.

They reached the hotel, and found they had a large front room overlooking, as the manager said, the lake, and with a wonderful view through a break in the hills down to the plains thirty miles away. At the time though, they could see nothing. Still, it was their first leave, and it was wonderful to feel free of parades, mess life, and "shop" for ten days.

Next morning Bob woke early. the sun was shining, and there was a sharp nip in the air. He leant out of the window and breathed the lovely pine-scented freshness of the morning. The view was indescribable. Below him lay the lake, and beyond, through a gap in the hills, he could see the early morning sun turning the distant plains into every colour of the rainbow. It was as if a vast opal was cupped in the framework of the hills. He wanted to have it all to himself for a little while, just to feel it all alone, so he did not wake Brian just yet.

They were dressed by eight, had a quick breakfast, and set out to explore the queer little rambling, climbing town. The streets were narrow and very steep, with shops crowded

together each side. It was all very interesting, and both Bob and Brian felt like schoolboys on holiday.

Eventually they reached the "flats", about the only large level piece of ground in Naini. Here was the lake, the sailing club, cinema, polo ground, and tea-shop "Ronaldo's" where nearly all Naini society gathered to exchange gossip over their "elevenses".

Bob suggested hiring a "tat" each, and riding round the lake. This they did, followed by the "tat" owners who seemed to trot alongside for miles without effort, pointing out the local objects of interest on the way. It appeared the lake had a bad name locally, as several bathers had been drowned in it, the local superstition being that the Goddess of the Lake had to have at least one victim a year.

The little golf course was most exciting to play on. Bogey was 30 for the nine holes, none of which was longer than an "iron" shot, and each hole seemed more interesting than the previous one. They climbed up or sloped down to the greens, some greens being at the edge of a precipice of about a five hundred feet drop. The views were lovely at each turn of the course, and the morning air, thick with the scent of the pines after the rain, was like wine.

Bob and Brian joined the Club as temporary members, and soon got to know everyone and were having a marvellous time. There

were about fifty or sixty young women in Naini for the hot weather, and as the male population under the age of thirty was only about a couple of dozen, invitations to dances, picnics, and yachting parties were soon forthcoming. Everyone was very nice, and the contrast to Ralpur was a great change for Bob and Brian. They entered into every function with zest, and soon it felt to them as if Ralpur was just a bad dream.

The days soon slipped by; each was having a mild "affair", and soon there were only forty-eight hours left, so feverish planning ensued as to how these last days should be spent to drag out each to its longest and waste no precious moments. A picnic was decided on, and the best place was agreed to be near Old Government House. This meant a stiff climb to the top of the range behind the town, but from there one could see the snows of the Himalayas, and it was well worth the trouble.

The party of six started early and climbed for about an hour or two. The baskets of food were being carried by coolies who had been sent on ahead. It was a beautiful day, and when they reached the picnic site they were well rewarded, for the snows stood out beautifully against a deep blue sky.

It was a merry party, a lot of innocent fooling and flirting, and only on the return journey did anyone get a little sentimental, and

they returned to Naini in pairs, very slowly, each assuring the other he or she would write, and of course send snaps.

There was a dance at "Ronaldo's" that evening, and the "picnickers" were going in a party, having dinner together first. Bob's girl friend, Sheila Cameron, was looking very attractive in a dark red evening dress which suited her almost black hair and eyes very well. He decided he was very fond of her and resolutely refused to think of Ruby King, and he found this very easy to do, as Sheila was a sweet girl and he really did like her. She on her side seemed fond of him too.

The dancing kept up till nearly two o'clock, and after the "King" had been played, Brian suggested supper and a row on the lake. Luckily the latter suggestion was not carried, as though there was a full moon, some of the party were definitely keeping upright more by luck than anything else, and certainly the Goddess of the lake would have had her victim fairly early in the proceedings had they carried out this idea.

Bob was seeing Sheila home, and as he helped her on with her cloak he said: "Let's not take a dandy, it's a gorgeous night, and won't take so very long to walk."

"All right," she answered, "it's our last night, and we don't want to end it too quickly, do we?"

They walked slowly, his arm round her waist. Neither spoke—the night was too lovely, and both were in rather an emotional mood. Every now and then they kissed. They were quite happy and content, and Bob somehow knew Sheila was different from Ruby King, and was glad. At her house they lingered a little—she cried as she kissed him "good-bye" and promised to try and see him at Christmas. They were both very young, and felt things so deeply.

And so the little break was over. Ten happy days, and Brian and he were in the same car, this time turned downhill. Both were rather silent, only Brian, as the last bend in the road hid Naini from view, said:

"God! I simply can't believe we're really going back to the old grind—and Ralpur."

They both relapsed again into gloomy silence.

What with the parties they had given and the lavish generosity they showed themselves, they had found their hotel bill a good deal more than they had expected, and though they had enough for their return tickets, they found only a few rupees left for the journey. After anxious consultation Brian suggested a scheme.

"I know, old boy, we won't buy the bearer a ticket. He can hide under the seat, and we'll push our suitcases after him when the inspector comes, and he'll never see. That'll give us a few 'chips' more for food."

"O.K.," said Bob, "but what about getting out at Ralpur?"

"That's easy. He can buy a platform ticket and say he only came to meet us, and in the crush they'll never notice."

The plan succeeded all right, but even with the money saved, the two felons by dinner were penniless and very hungry. It was then that Mohabbat Khan, the bearer, produced his great surprise—a somewhat battered chocolate cake.

"Sahib," with great pride, "I packed this at tea yesterday in the hotel."

So for dinner, breakfast, and, very reluctantly by then, for lunch next day, the cake was eaten. By Ralpur they were thoroughly sick of it, and were only too glad to see the last slice, by now brick hard, go out of the window. At Ralpur they were quite well known, and the station restaurant let them sign for a very welcome meal.

And so ended their leave.

# CHAPTER V

THE cold weather was returning, and with it came the families back to Ralpur after their summer in the cool hill stations, and soon the round of entertaining began once more. Tennis parties followed by cocktails at the Club, then the usual dinner parties, with the inevitable Anglo-Indian menu of "Consommé Julienne, Fried Pomfret, Roast Chicken, Trifle, and Craigie Toast." The young "attached" officers felt they had never left Ralpur.

However, Bob wrote often to Sheila Cameron, and she replied promptly, so they did not lose touch. She was now in Ghaziabad, about a hundred and fifty miles from Ralpur, so Bob decided he would ask her over for the week-end of the "Bachelors' Ball", and get a certain Mrs. Reid, whose husband was a cotton mill owner, to put her up. This he did, and all arrangements were made. Sheila was to stay three nights, and return on the Monday morning.

The "Bachelors' Ball" was a yearly affair and, as the name suggests, was given by all the bachelors in the station. They were hosts, and each subscribed Rs. 50, or about £ 4.0.0. towards its cost. As the hosts usually numbered anything

up to a hundred young men, the dance was easily the best of the year, and very much looked forward to.

It was also very amusing to see how the married officers and their wives, who could not attend unless invited by one of the hosts, becoming so effusively friendly to the unmarried subalterns and civilians who, until just before the dance, interested them not at all. Also the wives were furiously jealous when they learned that perhaps Mrs. Jones had been invited and not Mrs. Smith, or vice versa. In fact quite often serious quarrels arose over the whole business.

Even Bob, Mark and Brian, who had once been warned against being to much of a social success, found a spate of invitations to drink parties descending on them. In the end they asked a small party to come along, and Bob announced to Mrs. Peters, the wife of one of the Captains in the Loamshires, that he had a girl friend coming over from Ghaziabad for the week-end who would be in the party.

At once everyone was very curious: "Who was she?" "What was her father—civil, military, or a box-wallah (business man)?"

Actually her father was in the Civil Service and had an equivalent rank to that of a Major-General in the Army as far as "precedence" went. Immediately Bob found himself increasing in importance.

"Oh, you *must* bring her along to see us," gushed Mrs. Peters. "Come to dinner the night after the dance, and we'll go to the pictures afterwards. And where is she staying? I could put her up, you know."

Bob told her that Mrs. Reid had very kindly offered to do this. Mrs. Peters was disappointed and not a little annoyed that she had been "cut out" as she considered by a "box-wallah's" wife.

On the Saturday afternoon Bob was early at the railway station waiting for Sheila's train. At last it came in sight, stopped, and out she stepped, looking very cool and attractive in a little grey coat and skirt affair. They kissed rather shyly, and were a little tongue-tied during the drive to the Reids' bungalow. Once there though, Sadie Reid soon put them at their ease for, seeing they were both a bit shy of each other, she chattered gaily all through tea, and so gave them time to get used to one another again.

Bob was dining at the bungalow, so left after tea to go back to his rooms for a bath and change, returning about eight o'clock. Sam Reid was already changed and mixing drinks in the drawing-room. He was a large man, aged about forty or so, but looked younger.

"Come on in, Bob," he called. "We've got time for a couple of quick ones before the womenfolk arrive," and pouring out a stiff whisky, handed it to Bob. "Well," he went on,

"you're a lucky young—— Your girl friend's the snappiest thing in Ralpur tonight. You look out, young Bob, or those Loamshire snakes will try to cut you out."

Bob grinned happily. He loved to hear Sheila admired, and no one could take offence at the rather blunt words of Sam Reid—he meant it all so kindly. Anyhow, he was pleased Sheila was so pretty, and did not worry about the latter part of Sam's lecture.

In a few minutes Sheila and Sadie Reid appeared, and Sam poured them out a sherry each. Sheila was looking very lovely in white, and Bob could hardly take his eyes off her. She seemed to get on very well with Sadie Reid who obviously liked her, whilst Sam quite bluntly said:

"Young woman, you're looking far too pretty. There are going to be some broken hearts before you leave on Monday—aren't there, Bob ?

Sheila was very sweet about it, and replied, "No, I don't think so. I only came to be with Bob— didn't I, dear ?—and his heart is not going to be broken. The others probably won't even think about me," and laughing went and sat next to Bob. He felt so happy, and knew then he loved her.

At that moment the servant came to the door. "Dinner ready, Memsahib," he announ-

ced, and the little party got up and went into the next room. It was a happy little meal, and Sam was in great form, flirting outrageously with Sheila, and Bob, if he had not known it was all in fun, would certainly have been very jealous, as she was playing up nobly to Sam's efforts.

After dinner they started off to the Club. The dancing had started, and the rest of the party were already there waiting, with Mark Fegen and Brian looking rather harassed.

"Oh, there you are," called Mark, obviously relieved. "We were afraid perhaps Sheila hadn't arrived or something." Then in a whisper to Bob: "That bloody Peters woman is in a hell of a temper. She didn't know, or at least says she didn't know, that you and Sheila were dining out and joining us after dinner. She says we all ought to have had it together—and also that you are late."

"Oh, damn her!" replied Bob. "She's lucky she was even asked. Don't let her upset you."

However, once the party got going, everything seemed all right, and even Mrs. Peters' ill-temper vanished, and with the arrival of the champagne, the atmosphere soon became very friendly and the party even hilarious.

Mark and Brian had each got a partner from the new season's fishing fleet, and they

were jolly girls who added to the fun, but it was Sheila who appeared to attract most attention. Mrs. Peters was very pleasant, and before the evening was even half over, had invited her to make use of her house any time she wished to come to Ralpur again.

Bob had noticed meanwhile that one or two of the Loamshires were definitely discussing Sheila and would presently try to "crash in" on the party. He wondered, rather amused, how they would set about it. He was not long left in doubt, for when he went to the bar while she was dancing with Sam Reid, one of them came up to him and said:

"Have a drink, old man?" and then added, "I think your girl friend looks topping. Would you mind if we had the odd dance? Our party is completely dead."

Bob replied, "You'd better ask her, hadn't you? I myself don't really mind."

So when the band next struck up a slow fox-trot, the subaltern came over and asked Sheila for a dance. She accepted, and off they swept amongst the other couples on the floor. After the dance she returned to the table, and seemed rather annoyed. Bob asked her what had happened.

"Oh nothing," she said, and then added, "I don't like him. He seemed to think I'd much rather be in his party than with officers

of the 'unattached list', and seemed to take it for granted I'd have supper with them."

Bob laughed. It was just as he had expected, and he told Sheila not to be upset, and soon she was as happy as ever. However she refused the next Loamshire's request for a dance.

After supper Bob and Sheila sat out in the grounds. It was a beautiful warm night, and the scent of flowers hung in the air. Bob was holding her close to him, whispering to her, "Sheila, my darling, I've missed you so."

"And I missed you, dearest—terribly," she murmured. "I was so happy as today drew nearer and nearer."

He crushed her to him. The scent of her hair intoxicated him, her nearness, her loveliness. She returned his hot, passionate young kisses, straining her young body against his. They forgot the outside world. Time stood still for them. They only knew they loved, and were loved in return, and were happy.

When they returned to the ballroom, they felt everyone must know their secret. Indeed it was so obvious they were in love, their party laughed good-naturedly at them both, and did not mind them dancing together the rest of the evening.

At three o'clock they broke up, and said their several good-nights, arranging to bathe

together—Mrs. Peters as hostess—next morning. It was to be a picnic about twenty miles from Ralpur, where there was the Dyalbagh Lake. She said she would make all the arrangements, no one else was to worry. Only "remember bathing suits".

The Sunday passed all too quickly. The picnic had been a great success, and now Sheila had only one night left. Sadie Reid suggested a drive after dinner, but made it quite clear that neither she nor Sam would come. Bob was to drive, and have Sheila to himself.

They drove out again to the lake. It lay under the moon, and by the shore they loved one another. They were very happy, and made plans for the future. It was impossible to marry for three years—they both knew that. Bob would then have his second "pip", and his Indian Army pay plus his own allowance of a hundred a year would be just enough. They were so sure of each other. They knew they could wait.

Sheila and her family were going home after Christmas, but Bob was to apply for ten day's leave before then and meet her parents and ask for their consent. Till then, she said happily, "I'll wear your ring, darling, round my neck, and put it on when I'm alone." She had his signet ring—to both it seemed as lovely as any that could have been bought for all the money in the world.

Ralpur seemed dead after she had left. But they wrote every day, and telephoned whenever they could. More invitations seemed to come in now, and the three friends found the atmosphere somehow changed. They suddenly appeared to be universally accepted, and so asked to join in anything going. The unfortunate Indian, Harnarain Singh, was never included. In fact he was seldom seen, and appeared to live a queer little secret life of his own.

When Christmas was three weeks off, Bob applied for and got his leave. He was very surprised, as it was not often an attached officer was given leave, and he had already had ten days. But he was far too happy to question his luck, and Christmas Eve found him stepping out of the train at Ghaziabad.

Sheila was waiting on the platform. They kissed and drew apart, too happy to speak. She led the way to the car, and drove him back to the house.

"Mummie and Daddy are both at home," she said, "and longing to meet you."

Bob felt very nervous. "I do hope they like me."

"They're sure to, darling. Don't worry, and anyhow, darling, they've seen your photo and liked it awfully."

Bob laughed. "You'd make yourself believe that, sweetheart, wouldn't you?"

She agreed happily.

The car drew up in front of a large cool-looking bungalow. Tea was laid out on the verandah, and a middle-aged couple were sitting at the table. They came forward to welcome Bob, and were so kind and natural, he felt immediately at ease, and knew he was liked by them, and felt at home for the first time in India.

"We've heard such a lot about you," said Mrs. Cameron, as she shook his hand, "we feel we know you already, and do hope you'll enjoy your first Xmas in India."

"I know I will," he replied. "It is awfully good of you to have me. I was dreading spending it in the Mess. This is almost like home again."

He was shown his room, and after tidying up, he came down to tea, and learnt there was to be a small dinner party followed by a dance at the club. Mr. and Mrs. Cameron were playing bridge with their two guests after dinner, and told Bob and Sheila they could go off together to the dance, adding with a smile that they imagined the two children would not find that idea disagreeable.

So at about nine-thirty the two young people with the car at their disposal set off happily to the Club. Bob asked Sheila if her parents knew he wanted to marry her.

She replied, "Yes, mother does, so I suppose by now father knows too. But they must be pleased, darling, or they wouldn't have agreed to your coming down, and mother said she thought you were nice tonight."

They both felt very happy, and decided Bob must see her father next day. In the meantime they danced, sat out in the Club grounds, and looked into what seemed to them a rosy future.

Bob was terribly nervous after breakfast on the morrow. He blurted out. "May I speak to you about Sheila, sir?"

"Well, I know what you're going to say," replied Mr. Cameron with a smile, "and so let's go into my study and have a quiet chat about it."

Bob felt a load off his mind. Anyhow the worst was over, and evidently Mr. Cameron was not angry about it.

They sat down near the window.

"Well, Bob, and now tell me how you stand, when you hope to be able to keep Sheila in comfort. and—well, tell me all about yourself."

"I am only a Second Lieutenant now, sir," he began, "but I join my Indian unit in February, and in two years I'll get my 'second pip' and be earning Rs. 535 a month. I get an allowance of £100, sir, and at the moment I find I can live easily on my British rates of pay and

have been saving about fifty rupees a month. So I ought to save even more from February, and I worked out I'd have about £ 400 by the time we got married. You see, I don't touch my allowance."

He broke off and looked anxiously at Mr. Cameron, who kept silent for a few minutes and then said:

"I like you, and so does my wife. I need say nothing about Sheila." He laughed pleasantly. "You seem to be comfortably off, and of course I should give you both some financial help. But are you both old enough to know your own minds? I know you think you do," he added, seeing Bob's face, "but you are only twenty-one, I believe, and Sheila nineteen."

He stopped and looked at Bob enquiringly.

"I realise that, sir," he said. "Sheila and I have discussed it, and as she goes home next week and will not see me or me her for at least a year, we've agreed to release each other if our feelings change. So she need not feel bound to me in any way."

"Righto," said her father. "I have no objection to the engagement being announced, and now all that chat is over, we'll have a little celebration tonight, and announce it at dinner. There are a few people coming in—we always have a party for Xmas dinner, and we'll spring the news then. All right?"

Bob could only stammer his thanks. It all seemed too good to be true. He went in search of Shiela and broke the news to her. She burst into tears.

"Darling, my darling, what is the matter?" Bob was miserable.

"Oh, I'm so happy—so terribly happy," she snuffled.

He stared at her in amazement, and then loved her all the more for her un-understandable ways.

Then arose the question of a ring. Bob wanted to give her a good one, but Sheila was firm. She said she would wear his signet ring till he came home on leave next year, when they could choose a nice one together. At present, she insisted, he could not afford it.

The days passed in a happy dream. They were always together, and so terribly in love. At last the time came to say 'good-bye'. They stood on the platform, the train was in.

"Good-bye, my own darling," Bob whispered as he held her close to him.

She was crying unashamed, and clung to him. "Good-bye, my dearest; write to me often, so often," she sobbed.

They were so in love. It was very hard to part.

When Bob got back to Ralpur he found the news of the engagement had preceded him by

some days, and he was the recipient of congratulations all round. In fact he was something unique, for it was almost unheard of for an officer to become engaged during his 'attachment' period, and as a general whole the station rather admired him for it, and wished him luck.

He found coming back to Ralpur was not nearly so bad this time as it had been when returning from Naini. He felt surer of things. The mere fact of being engaged made Sheila seem nearer to him than before, whereas previously he had been uncertain of her, felt he had no claim on her or had any right to expect he meant more to her than any other man. So his letters were frequent and full of happy plannings for first his leave home the next year, and then of their marriage.

In February he was due to join his Indian unit, and he heard early in January that he had been posted to the 17th Punjab Rifles. He was very pleased about it as he had applied to go to them, and been in correspondence already with their Adjutant. The regiment was stationed in Ratanagar, about three hundred miles from Bombay, and the Adjutant wrote to him saying:

"If you like you can have a week's joining leave and taste the 'flesh-pots' in Bombay. It's near here, and I expect you'll want to celebrate the end of your year's attachment. So report for duty on the 14th of February. I hope you'll be happy here."

# CHAPTER VI

BOMBAY was a revelation to Bob. He had almost forgotten there were such cities after a whole year up-country in small cantonments like Ralpur. The big hotels, the trams, buses like the familiar London 'Generals', electric light signs, cinemas built for films and not converted barns like those he was so used to—all fascinated him and caused him endless delight.

He booked a room at the Taj Mahal Hotel. It overlooked the harbour, had a private bathroom, and cost much more than he could afford, but he felt he wanted a week of luxury and set about enjoying himself with a will.

Looking through the telephone directory he found the number of a friend he had been at school with, and who now worked in the United Trust Bank in Bombay, and rang him up. He found he was at home, and arranged to meet him in the American cocktail bar at half past seven.

Bob went down early and ordered a whisky and soda. He sat drinking it slowly, looking out over the harbour which was dotted with the twinkling lights of ships at anchor. It looked

very beautiful, and he gazed out upon it, just letting his thoughts drift idly along.

"Hullo, you old snake!" a voice broke in on his thoughts. There was Cyril Newcombe, as fat and friendly as ever. He sat down and ordered more drinks, and beamed happily on Bob.

"How are we going to celebrate tonight?" he asked. "Respectably or otherwise? Or will you put yourself in my hands?"

Bob said he would leave it all to him.

"Right then," said Cyril. "I'll 'phone the girl friend, and tell her to lay on dinner in the flat. She'll have about an hour and a half to do it, and I'll tell her a scrap meal is O K. Tell her to produce someone for you too."

It appeared that Cyril's girl friend was a half-caste working in the Bombay Co-operative Society Stores. He went on to explain to Bob that nearly all the "box-wallah" bachelors kept one of these girls. Their pay was too little to live on decently, and in return for being set up in a flat, they apparently were absolutely faithful to their benefactors. Some of the girls were really beautiful, and anywhere outside India would have passed for pure white, but not having the money to get away, they were condemned for ever—despised by Indian and European alike—neither nationality ever being seen in public with them, though only too glad to mix with them in private.

Cyril was careful to explain all this to Bob, who could not help feeling sorry for his girl friend, but on meeting her and the girl she produced also, at dinner, he soon realised that the "chi-chi" was only too glad to have a protector –in fact, took a pride in an English lover. They were both pretty and smartly dressed, and it was an amusing evening, and Bob found it an interesting experience. He was still terribly innocent.

At about midnight, after dancing to the gramophone for a couple of hours, Cyril said they must go, and they made their farewells. The girl who had been asked to partner Bob—Janet McMurray—made it quite clear to him she expected to see a lot more of him—too much so for his peace of mind. However, he promised to fetch her from the store next day, and give her lunch.

Driving back, Cyril turned to Bob and asked: "Would you like to see where all the brothels are? They might interest you if you've never seen it before, and there's a whole street of them."

Bob was nothing loth, and as they drove along, Cyril told him that this street, by name of White Lane, consisted of nothing but brothels. They started at the expensive houses at one end, luxuriously fitted out, and where one could dance and sup without going 'all the way'—to the sordid dwellings at the other end

where stranded white women screamed out at passing cars offering themselves for eight annas, or roughly sixpence.

Bob didn't really believe him, but found soon enough it was just as Cyril had said. They turned into White Lane, and Cyril stopped outside a very nice-looking house.

"This," he said, "is No. 97. I know the Madame here, and she's a good sort. We can go in, have some drinks, and dance. Nothing else, old boy, so don't be alarmed—I know you're engaged!"

In they went. It was a most luxurious place. 'Madame' was Russian, as were most of her girls. An excellent band was playing, tables were set round the dance floor, and two very beautiful women came and sat with them. They drank and danced with no awkward pestering to do any more than that. In fact, if Cyril had not told him so, Bob would never have believed it was any other than some very *high class and respectable night club.*

After staying about an hour they left, and drove very slowly down the rest of the street. Gradually the houses got more decrepit—more shabby—more dirty and ramshackle. Eventually they reached some hovels, at the doors of which white women screamed at them to come in.

"Only eight annas, Mister. Come on, we're quite clean, what are you afraid of?"

It was horrible.

"For God's sake let's get out of this," said Bob, and gave a sigh of relief when the car turned out of White Lane, and was running down Queen's Road again. "That last bit was too awful," he said. "Why don't the authorities send them back to Europe? It's ghastly."

Cyril laughed. "You'll get used to it quick enough," he said. "They don't mind. All their lives they've done that. It's the only work they know. They started off at the hundred rupee end, like No. 97, and they've gradually drifted down to the eight anna area. They're quite content. They know no other life. All feeling is dead now—they exist, that's all."

But he saw Bob was upset, so did not rag him but drove him back to the Taj, and after a couple of drinks in Bob's room, left him, saying:

"I'll 'phone you tomorrow, old boy. We might bathe at Breach Candy, or drive out to Juhu or something. Anyhow I'll let you know early. Good-night."

Bob woke up late and found the sun streaming into his room. His morning tea was quite cold beside his bed, and his watch told him it was nearly eleven o'clock. He lay staring up at the ceiling. Suddenly he remembered his luncheon date, and started to get up, cursing his aching head. After a cold

bath he dressed and went downstairs to the barber's shop where he was shaved, had a shampoo and massage, and felt much better.

At one o'clock he called for Janet and took her to lunch at the Taj. He felt he was quite safe in doing so, as he was a stranger to Bombay and no one knew who he was. She was a bright little thing, and Bob enjoyed the lunch with her, and as it was a half-day at the Stores, he asked her what she would like to do.

They ended up by driving out to Juhu beach where they lay in the sun and bathed, when they felt it getting too hot. Driving back in the car Bob saw quite clearly that Janet liked him and expected him to make love to her. He wondered if Cyril had led her to understand that he, Bob, was looking for and wanted to set up a ménage in Bombay like his own. He rather hoped not, as besides being so much in love with Sheila whose memory was too fresh for him to look at anyone else, he liked Janet, she was attractive and straightforward, and he was still young enough to India not to want to hurt her feelings. He had not yet reached the stage where he looked on all half-castes as fair game. Anyhow, even had he wanted to set Janet up in a flat, he could never afford it on a subaltern's pay, and what a "box-wallah" could get away with did not apply to the Army, which was quite another matter.

Janet would not let him drive her back to her home—he learnt later from Cyril that she probably lived in a squalid little house full of not only other half-castes but full blooded Indians as well—so no doubt did not want him to see it. He therefore dropped her outside the Queen's Road tram stop and went on to the Taj, where he found Cyril sitting in the American Bar waiting for him.

Bob told him of his outing, and Cyril was most emphatic on the subject of Janet. In fact he got quite excited about it.

"Good God, old boy," he exclaimed, "you can't do that. It's different for us—everyone does it, and it's more or less winked at, but no Army blokes keep flats. They'd be found out in no time and there'd be the hell of a row."

Bob said he realised this, but felt rather uncomfortable as perhaps Janet thought that meeting him like she did at Cyril's place meant that he intended to set her up comfortably.

"No, don't you worry," said Cyril. "Janet's a nice kid, and sensible. She knows you are in the Army, and if she does get silly—which she won't—I'll tell Babs, my girl friend, to speak to her. But if you do take her out and entertain her to any extent, I shouldn't be worried about making love to her. You needn't feel bloody about it."

Bob said nothing, and the subject was dropped. They dined at the hotel and then

went on to a cinema. A new film was being shown, and as the place was air-conditioned, it was, if anything, more luxurious and comfortable than an English picture palace, and Bob thoroughly enjoyed himself.

On the way back to the hotel Cyril suggested that, as the English mail boat was leaving next day, it would be a good idea to go and have some drinks and lunch on board, and see off the luckier than they, who were going home on leave.

"At least we can hear some English being spoken," he said, "and be served by white stewards, and feel nearer home for a bit. We do this nearly every Saturday, as a matter of fact."

Bob agreed, and Cyril said he would call for him about noon next day and, saying good-night, drove away.

From his window Bob could see the black funnels and buff decks of the homeward-bound P. & O. as she lay at Ballard Pier, and he was ready and waiting when Cyril drove up to fetch him. Ten minutes later they were in the smoke-room bar, and feeling as if they themselves were among the lucky ones going home.

The bar was chock-full of people sailing, and their friends who had come to see them off. There were also not a few others who, like Bob and Cyril, had come on board just to feel a bit nearer home, and talk a little English to

cockney-speaking stewards, and drink English bottled Bass.

There was a lot of very heavy rapid drinking, and the noise in the bar was terrific, but the noise of a gong was heard above it, and the cry of "All friends ashore, please," rose above the din.

"Damnation," swore Cyril, "not enough time for lunch after all. Never mind, we'll go back to the Taj and watch her sail as we eat. We'll just have one more quick one, and then go."

He shouted his order for two Bass, and when they arrived remarked to Bob, as he paid for them: "Isn't it grand to handle clean English money again? You know, I look forward all the week to this. We all do, though we get damned sentimental and fed up just as the boat leaves." He laughed rather self-consciously.

In fact, as they sat at lunch near the window of the Taj, Bob felt completely miserable as the big black and buff steamer slowly passed across the harbour. It was going towards Sheila and home.

"I'm going to get drunk," he said.

Cyril laughed. "I know just how you feel. It's always worse the first time, but don't get soused. I thought of going to the races

after lunch. A big day today—the Eclipse Stakes, so it should be amusing."

So off they went.

The race-course presented an animated scene. Cyril was a member, so signed Bob into the members' enclosure. The wonderful saris of the Indian and Parsi ladies added a bright patch of colour to the surroundings, while the Europeans looked very smart in their last year's models.

Knowing nothing about horses, and betting on every race, Bob and Cyril were lucky to end the day about level. Still they had enjoyed it, met a lot of people Cyril knew, and arranged a party for the evening's dancing at the Taj. Before dinner, though, they joined a crowd of his friends, and went to the Yacht Club, where they sat on the lawn and drank a succession of short ones till well after half past eight when, with cries of surprise from the ladies at the lateness of the hour, the party broke up hastily and dashed off to change. Bob decided that so far at any rate it had been a grand day.

The dance turned out to be a hilarious affair, and drinks flowed freely—too freely. However, it was a most entertaining evening, and everyone enjoyed themselves thoroughly. Bob was told to let them all know whenever he was in Bombay again, and that a room was always at his disposal. He was rather overwhelmed by so much unexpected kindness.

Next day he saw Janet again, and it was she who first broached the subject. She wanted to be his mistress—she expected it and was glad about it. Bob explained his position as tactfully as he could, but found her hard to convince. She definitely wanted him.

In the end he gave in. He was lonely, and she was attractive, and a compromise was effected. Every week-end she would come up to Ishapur, thirty miles from Ratanagar, and stay at the Dak bungalow there, where Bob could easily come and see her without danger of being found out. She did not want him to keep her in Bombay, as Cyril did Babs, but just to let her come to him now and again, and so escape from the dreadful surroundings in which she now lived.

Poor Bob! He had no intention of taking her as his mistress. He thought he could remain a good friend, and afford her the little enjoyment she craved. He was bitterly to regret his weakness for the next four years. However, for the moment he was happy, and the few remaining days of his leave passed pleasantly, and on the 13th he said good-bye to Bombay and started his journey towards Ratanagar. He was now in the Indian Army, and his first year was over.

# CHAPTER VII

BOB had been in his Indian regiment about a month when one afternoon he sat at his desk trying to write to Sheila. He was finding it a most difficult job, as his relationship with Janet was becoming increasingly difficult, though she had not yet actually become his mistress. However, she had been twice to Ishapur, and Bob knew the time had come either to break with her for good, or give in to the increasing desire he had to take her, and it was obvious, a decision had to be made before he saw her again.

In the end he decided not to make up his mind until he met her again when he could talk to her reasonably, and so avoid hurting her in a clumsily worded letter. So the next week-end found him in the Dak bungalow with Janet.

She was doubly attractive that evening. Perhaps it was the thought of not seeing her again that made it seem so, but Bob soon found he could no longer resist his desire for her, nor did he want to, and with a little sigh of triumph she relaxed in his arms. She was something he never had thought possible. Her mixed blood made her love-making terrifying in its

intensity. She possessed him completely, and he knew he could never give her up.

When he got back to Ratanagar there was a letter from Sheila. He sat looking at it, not daring to open it. He read it at last and felt despair. She was so loving, trusting him, happy that each day brought their meeting a little nearer. She loved him, and he knew he loved her—when away from Janet—but directly he found himself alone with her, he was without strength. He had not the power to keep away from her.

Eventually he realised he had to write to Sheila. It was a miserable letter. He hid nothing, and told her it was impossible to continue the engagement. He asked her to forgive him if she could, as he still loved only her, but he could never come to her now as his sordid liaison with Janet had ruined all their happy plans. He never got a reply.

Soon he grew to hate Janet, but even hating her, he had to go to her, till at last he got desperate and did not know what to do. His hand was soon forced, as it got to the ears of the Colonel that his newly joined subaltern was tied up with an Anglo-Indian girl. Bob was sent for and questioned. He denied nothing. The Colonel, a ranting bully of a man, hated by officers and men, had no sympathy for him. Bob had not expected any, so stood before his C.O. and let the storm burst about his ears.

He was told he had made a bad start in the regiment and had let it down, and was very lucky not to lose his commission. Bob quite realised this. Also he must break off his affair at once. This he was only too glad to do, and Janet, realising that a cashiered officer would be of small use to her, proved reasonable, to his great relief.

Bob allowed a few days to pass, and then asked the Colonel for a private interview. The old man's furious rage had burnt itself out, and he was almost pleasant.

"Come along about seven to my bungalow," he said. "We can then have a talk over a drink or two."

Bob thanked him, and seven o'clock found him standing outside the Colonel's bungalow very ill at ease. The C. O. was waiting for him, and Bob started straight away with what he wanted to say. He hid nothing, told the Colonel about his engagement, his attempts to break away from Janet, his weakness, and the end of his hopes of marriage. Finally he offered to resign his commission.

The Colonel thought for a bit, and then said: "Well, you've had a pretty hard lesson. I was furious with you when I first heard about your show, but I see you've only been a bit of a bloody fool. The other officers don't know about it—only I do—so we'll forget all about it and start again."

Bob was astonished and very grateful. He knew the Colonel was hated. He knew he was a bully. But these were not the words of either. He learned much later in his service that the 'old man', as he was called, always climbed down and was pleasant if stood up to, as Bob had done. He only had six month's command left, and really wished to avoid any possible row. He however loathed Bob, but the latter did not know this at the time, so left the bungalow fairly happy.

And so the weeks passed in the daily routine of drill before breakfast, then office work. Back to lunch, followed by the afternoon nap, and tennis at the Gymkhana Club after tea. Bob was not happy. There were no officers of his own age in the regiment, only five being present in the station, and he the youngest by some fourteen years.

Gradually he grew bitter and vindictive, and in his loneliness he drank too heavily. He did not join the Club, so failed to meet even the few outside people there were in Ratanagar.

In July the blow fell. He got a letter from Janet. She was going to have a baby, and it was his. Bob, in his ignorance and panic, never questioned this as being the truth or otherwise. He wrote to her and asked her how he could help. She replied that the only solution was for her to get to England where she was unknown, and have her baby there. So he

went to the moneylenders and borrowed enough to send her home and keep her for a year. He had no intimate friend to discuss the matter with, and to him this seemed the only solution. He therefore saddled himself with a loan at thirty-six per cent compound interest, which took him three years to repay. He could afford no leave, or enjoyments of any kind.

October came, and with it a new subaltern joined the regiment, and the Colonel terminated his command. Bob was very happy, and the two youngsters soon became fast friends, as 'Fatty' Prentice was a most likable youth, and extremely amusing. They shared a bungalow, and did everything together.

Bob was very hard up while paying back his loan, but when he and Fatty wanted the odd week-end away, what with post-dated cheques and added interest, he managed usually to get the moneylender to forgo any particular month's repayment, and so enable him to have a little fun. Still it was a hand-to-mouth existence, and a chaotic financial state of affairs for Bob, but gradually he found he didn't care about his debts, and got reckless and rather foolish about them. To him they appeared inevitable, and as such useless to fight against.

About the same time Leslie Ford, another subaltern, returned to the battalion from a course he had been on, followed by two month's leave. He had spent this leave in Australia as

he was engaged to a girl in Melbourne, and was very fed up at having to come back. He was a year older than Bob, and finding they had a great deal in common, soon became inseparable. It was a very happy trio that shared the one bungalow.

Bob asked Leslie what the new C. O. was like to work with. He looked pleasant enough, as he was very big and fat, had a round cheery face, and appeared to be easy-going and likable. Leslie thought for a bit before answering.

"Well, he's a nice old ass. Never does a stroke of work—bloody selfish though. Only thinks of his own leave, but at least he leaves you alone and is pleasant to live with in the Mess. On the whole he is O. K. Anyhow infinitely preferable to that swine that has just gone."

"But what do the other chaps think of him?" asked Bob.

"About the same as I do," Leslie replied. "We don't know him terribly well, you know, as he's only transferred from a British regiment to us. Hasn't been here long. But, as I said before, he's very lazy; only too pleased to leave you to do your own job, but a nice bloke to have in the Mess."

Bob thought this description summed up the "Blimp", as he was called, fairly accurately. He liked him himself, but it was easy to see the

battalion was being run by a mad keen Major, the second-in-command.

It was a queer Mess really, as there were the Colonel, the Second-in-Command, a Major Clarke, the Adjutant, and then a gap of twelve years down to Leslie Ford and Bob and Fatty. These three were therefore thrown together more than they would have been normally, and soon began to live a life almost completely cut off from their fellow officers, only meeting them on parade, or for the odd meal in the Mess.

Major Clarke was a lonely figure. His wife would not come out to India but remained at home with the two children, running up vast bills, and going through a succession of lovers. He would not divorce her for the sake of the children, and in his loneliness was apt to pour out his soul to anyone who would listen, or who he found alone in the Mess. It was rather awkward at times, as, especially when a little tight, he would go into the most intimate details of their married life, and why it was such a failure.

He caught Bob one evening before dinner. He opened the subject by asking was Bob engaged, and on receiving the reply of "No", started on to his grievance.

"Sensible fellow. Don't ever get married. Look at me. My marriage has been a complete failure ever since the first night of our honeymoon. I found my wife hated being touched, and it's been hell ever since."

He took a long drink out of his whisky glass, and pondered gloomily. Bob hoped he would not go on. However, the Major was well under way.

"Yes. Couldn't bear me around. Now she stays at home, runs me into debt, and fools around with anyone except me. Had a young cadet hanging about when I was home last. Then when I try to make love to her she hates it, and I feel I could kill her afterwards."

Bob could think of nothing to say, but made some lame excuse and left hastily. He went in search of Leslie whom he found playing his gramophone and drinking hard with Fatty Prentice.

"I say, Leslie," he started, "it's been bloody embarrassing in the Mess just now. Old Clarke has been pouring out his life story to me."

Leslie laughed. "Oh, God! that's nothing new. He tells everyone. The whole station has heard it some time or other, but actually, although it's six of one and half a dozen of the other in some ways, Mrs. C. is an absolute bitch, and he has a frightful time. He's still fond of her, unfortunately, and as for the kids, he dotes on them."

They went on drinking and listening to Leslie's new records till it was time for Mess, when they went off to bath and change.

And so the days passed by, and Bob gradually learned all the queer little stories there were about his fellow officers, and found that on the whole they were a damned nice crowd, though without Leslie and Patty he would have been completely lost.

# CHAPTER VIII

As Christmas drew near, it became a burning question between the three as to where they were to spend it. They were determined not to stay in the Mess, as nothing could be more frightful than the "Ladies' Guest Night", which was how Xmas was celebrated in the Mess. Eventually they decided to ask for four day's leave, hire a car, and drive to Mahableshwar, a hill station about 150 miles away. There was a good Club at which one could stay, and usually it was full of Bombay people at that time.

So on the 24th they started off in a hired Ford. Bob was driving. Fatty in front with him, and Leslie in the back. They had sent their bearers and luggage on ahead by bus. After having lunch in Poona, they took the Mahableshwar road, and were going along in fine style when a lorry full of sand turned out of a small track and stopped dead, right across the road. Bob jammed on the brakes and found nothing happened. He shouted to Fatty and Leslie to jump, which they did, and the next moment the car hit the lorry at forty miles an hour.

Leslie and Fatty were unhurt save for scratches and bruises, but Bob was thrown

through the windscreen and had a very bad cut over his right eye. The car was wrecked. He was carried to the side of the road, and was treated by an Indian doctor who materialised from a small village nearby, as did a large crowd with a very keen young Police Inspector. They were in a native state, and the Inspector wanted to show how efficient he was.

"Not your fault, Sir," he exclaimed. "Not your fault at all. Lorry is without doubt the blameful one. He is across the whole road. Driver is damned bloody fool."

He paused for effect. The driver expostulated and received a hearty buffet on the side of the head. There was no more argument. The Inspector was in his element. It was not often he had a case in which he could show off both his command of English and his efficiency to British officers.

He drew diagrams of the accident, and wrote a report putting the entire blame on to the lorry driver. He then emptied the lorry of its load, packed it with the officer's kits, asked them to get in, and ordered the driver to take them to the nearest hospital, which was at the small town of Rai. There he said Bob could be stitched up properly, as it was an American Mission hospital, and very good.

The missionary doctor sewed up the cut, and soon Bob felt much better. All this time the unhappy lorry driver was being castigated

by the Inspector, who finally made him drive them all the way to Mahableshwar, quite eighty miles out of the wretched man's route.

They reached the Club eventually at ten o'clock, and had dinner. The Inspector was very thrilled to set foot in a European Club. They gave him a large whisky, and he was delighted. Bob had one drink, and 'passed out' completely. He evidently had a slight concussion, so was carried off to bed.

At last the Inspector said good-bye, after having asked Leslie to report how helpful he had been to his Police Headquarters, and climbing into the lorry which he had kept waiting all this time, loftily gave the driver permission to start back.

Bob woke feeling a lot better. It was Christmas Day, and for a moment he felt moody and unhappy, remembering how he had spent the last Christmas with Sheila. But the sun was shining, the windows of his room overlooked the little golf course, and he jumped out of bed feeling quite happy again.

Leslie and Fatty were already at breakfast, and were surprised to see him up so soon. The dining room was fairly crowded, and they eyed their fellow guests with interest. In the far corner of the room were a young couple whose faces were vaguely familiar. The man was tall, good looking and dark; the girl a blonde,

dressed in very smart navy blue beach pyjamas. They looked a jolly pair, and there was much guessing as to who they were.

After breakfast they played golf. It was almost hot, although the course was three thousand feet above sea level, but it was a very enjoyable game which, after a few holes of serious golf, deteriorated into the winner of each hole challenging the rest to play the next hole with any one club he chose.

It was in the middle of a hole being played with niblicks that they met the Greenways, as they found the couple at breakfast were called, and soon all five were hitting wildly about the course, making a lot of noise, to the annoyance of some of the more serious players. The Greenways were from Bombay, where he was in a large American oil concern. They were leaving next day, and suggested Bob and Fatty should go down with them and have a good beat up in Bombay as their guests before returning to Ratanagar. Leslie had a date in Poona.

That night to celebrate Christmas a dance was given at the Club. It was not a very gay affair, but the party of five were soon enjoying themselves, and each in turn mixed his or her cocktail invention. Some fearful concoctions were produced. The worst was Thelma Greenway's, which consisted mainly of condensed milk and liqueur brandy shaken up with ice, and a dash of gin.

"Good God!" Bob gasped as he tasted it. "What is this hell brew?"

"An Angel's Kiss, darling," she said proudly. "I invented it myself."

It was really terrible, and luckily they managed to throw the remainder out of the window when she went to powder her nose. She was delighted when on her return she found it all finished.

"Oh, good," she cried happily. "I'll make you some more," and off she tripped towards the bar.

Bob luckily side tracked her by making her dance, and all was well. When they returned to the table the party were on whiskies again—that is, all except Fatty, who was being extremely ill outside in the garden, and whose unhappy groans could be heard through the open windows.

Eventually they dropped out one by one and retired to bed, agreeing to leave for Bombay next morning at ten. That would mean they should get there comfortably by about dinner time, or with luck a little before. Anyhow they would not have to hurry, which was the main thing.

* *

At ten next morning they were well down the road, and by lunch time were just outside Poona, so they stopped and had a picnic tiffin at the side of the road, and were off again by two o'clock. It was very dusty, a fine red sand

almost, and in the open car there was no protection, and it got into their eyes and throats, and soon all were filthy dirty.

Tea-time found them at Khandala, right on the edge of the Western Ghats, and at the ramshackle little hotel nestling in the hills they washed and tidied up a bit. All were rather tired by this time. They started again before dark, and at half-past seven the car drew up outside the Taj where Bob and Fatty were dropped. The Greenways said, "we'll 'phone you tomorrow and arrange a party," and drove away.

Bob and Fatty booked a double room, and after a bath and a couple of stiff drinks, felt much better. They had no plans for the evening, so went down to the bar and looked through the amusement guide in the evening paper. Finally they decided not to go out at all.

"We've not heard a decent band for years," Bob argued, "and the band here is damned fine, so let's dine here and stay on for the dance afterwards. It doesn't matter if we don't have partners—we may pick up a couple of tourists. You never know, and the 'Empress of Britain's' in this week-end on her world tour."

The ever-agreeable Fatty was quite willing, so they settled down to some steady and serious drinking before dinner. The bar was full and very gay. On a small platform at one end of the room, under a mural decoration of a nude

sitting in a champagne glass, a very attractive girl was singing to the accompaniment of a piano and drums played by two negroes. They were very good, and Fatty applauded so lustily that after her turn the girl came to the bar and asked in broken English:

"You like my turn—hein?"

They assured her it was wonderful. She drank with them for the rest of the evening in between songs, and when her little show was over, Bob suggested she danced and dined with them too. She was only too pleased, and at half-past nine they went upstairs to the dining-room to eat, or as Fatty said happily—"If I don't get some blotting paper inside me I'm going to be sick."

Margaret Stein proved very good company. She told them she had only just arrived in Bombay, and her contract at the Taj ended in April, after which she thought she would try Delhi and Calcutta. Bob warned her against small up-country offers, and she said she knew all about it. If she could not get a good offer she would go home for a few months, and return to India next cold weather when it would be easy to get a good job again.

Fatty was showing every sign of an imminent disaster. His round, rather baby face was flushed, his hair was on end, and his vacant glassy stare showed he saw nothing and knew nothing. Bob turned to Margaret.

"I'll just get him off to bed, and then come back. Will you stay here? It's early yet, and I thought we might drive out to Juhu Beach after this."

"That will be lovely," she replied. "I will wait here. Do not be too long".

With great tact Bob led Fatty off to bed. He came back and found Margaret waiting at the table. They danced for a while. She moved beautifully and to hold her was a delight. She was a most disturbing creature.

Soon after midnight he suggested they might make a move, so they collected their wraps and, as the night was so clear and lovely, they took an open car. On reaching Juhu they walked to the beach, and sat on the warm sand in the shelter of the palm trees.

The bay stretched to right and left of them in a wide semi-circle, fringed with palms that showed clearly against the moonlit sky. The only sound was the murmur of the surf breaking against the shore, while far away was the muffled throb of a native drum.

They were very close together, both lonely and vaguely unhappy. She was far from home, and in spite of a brave face she turned to the world, she was frightened and wanted comfort. He felt he had been a failure, he was in debt and only living in the immediate present. Both felt so alone, and wanted the sympathy of the other.

He held her closer. She came into his arms and cried a little, asking for comfort. Soon she quietened and snuggled closer to him. He felt her soft, firm young breasts pressing against him. Passion swept over them, and under the clear moon, cradled in the warm silver sand with the murmur of the sea in their ears, they became lovers.

Aeons passed. Passion was spent. They looked at each other and smiled. Utterly happy, they felt a great tenderness sweep over them.

Dawn was breaking as they drove back to the hotel. He saw her to her room, and as he left her, he saw the night porter grinning at him. Bob felt as if he could kill him, and went up to his room furious. Hardly bothering to undress he tumbled into bed, and the next thing he knew was hearing Fatty's unhappy groans as he awoke. It was nearly midday, and Fatty had a terrific headache. He staggered about the room and got a cold bath ready. He felt better for it, and with a towel round him, sat on the end of Bob's bed and started to cross-question him.

"I feel like Hell," he started off. "What time did I pass out, and who put me to bed? Did I create a scene or put up a 'black' in any way?"

Bob assured him he had not put up any 'black' or behaved badly, and Fatty cheered up.

"By the way," he asked suddenly, "what happened to the little German girl?"

Bob did not want to discuss her. He was feeling rather sentimental over her. "I took her to Juhu," he answered shortly, but Fatty, suspecting nothing, blundered on:

"Did she do her stuff?" he asked, and a storm broke about his ears. "Shut up, God damn you!" shouted Bob. "Can't you ever think anything decent about a girl?"

Fatty was astounded. "All right, all right. You usually do try to get there, so what's the matter now? What's more, you generally don't mind me knowing, but if you're in love with the bloody girl, it's O.K. by me."

Bob felt rather silly—it was quite true what Fatty had said—so he apologised. Fatty did not take offence, and soon was his tubby, friendly self again, and Bob soon confided in him. Fatty immediately got excited, and planned and plotted. He loved managing other people's love affairs, and though he never indulged in any himself, considered that, through his long experience of Bob's and Leslie's usually very tangled and complicated ones, he was an expert in such matters.

Bob cut him short. "By the way, the Greenways said they'd 'phone. Perhaps they have forgotten."

But almost immediately the bell rang, and lifting the receiver, Bob heard Thelma's voice.

"Hullo," she said. "I expect you two feel like Hell. What about tonight? We thought you might both dine with us at the Taj, and we could dance afterwards. I'll get hold of some more women. How does that suit you?"

Bob said it sounded grand. and added. "By the way, would you mind if I asked a girl friend?"

"No, of course not." Thelma replied. "Bring her along", but he noticed she did not sound very enthusiastic. However, he decided, perhaps it was only imagination.

He telephoned Margaret's room. A very sleepy voice answered him.

"Oh dear, I am not awake properly. Is it you, my Bobby?"

"It's me, darling. When will you be up? I want to take you out to lunch. Fatty, me and you. So hurry up, see?"

"Just half an hour, Bobby." she pleaded. "I must look nice for you."

He laughed. "All right, darling. We will bang on your door in half an hour. If you aren't ready, we'll walk right in. Promise!"

It was a happy, care-free trio that sat down to lunch in bathing suits at Breach Candy. The sun was warm, and the bathing pool looked very inviting. They sat on the grass under a large

striped umbrella, and ate a queer mixture of ices, beer, sandwiches, and fruit.

Margaret was very happy. She was only a child in some ways.

"This is lovely," she said. "At my home in Bavaria in the summer time we did like this too. We had picnics by the river. It was so nice. But it is nicer with you, my Bobby."

He kissed her. Both had forgotton Fatty, who chuckled paternally. He felt very old and wise. He approved strongly of this new 'affaire'. It seemed to him he would have lots of happy hours arranging and planning things for the two lovers.

The afternoon passed lazily, and after tea Bob told Margaret of the evening's programme. She seemed rather alarmed. She was shy of meeting his friends. He assured her they were very nice, and would love her.

They drove back to the hotel, and Bob and Fatty told her they would meet in the lounge at seven. Margaret had no performance on that night, so she promised to be on time.

As Bob and Fatty went up to change, Fatty suddenly said: "You're damned fond of her, aren't you? You've got it badly this time."

"Yes," said Bob. "I am damned fond of her."

Fatty thought for a bit, then said: "Well, I shouldn't let it be too obvious to Thelma if I were you."

Bob was astounded. "What the hell do you mean?" he asked.

"Nothing, oh nothing at all," said Fatty. "Just that I shouldn't if I were you. That's all," and he would say no more.

It was a very puzzled Bob that went to his bath. He could make no sense of it, and finally decided Fatty was an ass, so dismissed the matter from his mind. Fatty was ready before him, so went to collect Margaret, and both were down in the American Bar when Bob was dressed.

Thelma and Peter Greenway arrived a few minutes later with five other people, all Bombay business men and their wives. She had brought another girl, Patricia Wakefield, who seemed a hard-bitten child for her years, and knocked back a series of cocktails before dinner so rapidly that Bob was very glad he hadn't got to foot the bill.

He noticed Thelma eyeing Margaret closely. Suddenly she asked: "I wonder where I have seen you before, Fraulein?" and waited smiling pleasantly for her reply. Thelma really could be a little cat when she wanted to, and it was obvious to everyone that she knew quite well who Margaret was, but hoped to make her uncomfortable.

"I sing here three times a week," she answered. "Perhaps you have heard me some time, no?"

Peter Greenway broke in. "That's it, of course. Now I remember, and I liked it awfully. Can't you be persuaded to give us a turn to-night?"

Margaret laughed happily. "No, no, really, but you are so kind to say such nice things."

Thelma stared angrily at her husband, and then subsided in a huff till they all went up to dinner.

They danced till nearly two o'clock. Everyone enjoyed themselves except Thelma, who was really behaving extremely badly. She was rude to Peter, and insultingly condescending to poor Margaret, who told Bob miserably during one of their dances:

"Your friend she does not like me. She wants to have you for herself. She is jealous." Then added, "She is so pretty too? Do you not think so, Bobby?" Anxiously almost, she looked up at him.

"Darling," he laughed at her, and squeezed her harder to him, "you little goose. I have only known her three days, and anyhow you are all wrong."

Margaret looked very wise and said no more. But when they returned to their table

and found Thelma and Peter had gone home, she looked at Bob with an unmistakable air of "I told you so."

When the party finally broke up, Bob, Margaret, Fatty and Patricia decided to drive out to Juhu and see the dawn in. There the two couples separated and wandered a little way apart. Margaret knew they had to return to Ratanagar next day, and was very wretched about it.

She told Bob she would not stay in India after her present engagement was over, as any other offer would only take her away from Bombay, and so further from him. "If I have to be away from you," she whispered, "I would be happier in my own country."

Bob felt terribly unhappy. He promised her he would always remember her and wait, that she was bound to come to India again when they would meet once more. She promised to wait for him also. Each tried to comfort the other, but by the very misery of their last goodbye, and the desperate way they clung together, neither was deceived. Bob knew he would never see Margaret again. Nevertheless they could write, and the world was small. Somewhere, sometime, they might come together again.

# CHAPTER IX

ON returning to Ratanagar, Bob found his Bombay trip had had disastrous results on his overdraft and loan instalments. He racked his brains, and hit upon the only solution which seemed to him possible, and that was a complicated system of post-dated cheques. He no longer got his allowance, as business at home was bad, and his father had written to him saying that now he was in the Indian Army and drawing higher pay, he decided to cut off the yearly aid he gave Bob.

So for the next few months the outlook was far from bright for Bob. He calculated, however, that if he could stave off his most pressing debts till September he would be all right, as he was detailed to attend a Musketry Course then, and drew extra pay while there in the form of travelling and daily allowances which would total about three hundred rupees. This he could hand over straight away to his money-lender.

He therefore went through a very bad period for the next few months. Leslie went on the Signal Course at Poona, and so he was thrown into Fatty's company more than ever. This did not help matters much, as Fatty was

getting a large allowance from home, and spending it freely. He kept trying to get Bob to "beat up Bombay again" in his own words, or "throw a drink party". and when he learned Bob was in the 'soup' financially, he offered to lend him money.

It was very difficult. Bob wanted to enjoy himself, and with the hot weather coming on, and everyone else taking their ten days' leave to the hills, it was doubly hard to have to deny himself everything. And Fatty, in his generous kindly way, did not help at all. He was diabolically clever.

"Look here, Bob," he said, "you won't borrow from me. O. K. then, what happens? There's only you here to fool around with, and if you won't play, then it's bloody boring for me too. So if you'll be sensible, we can both enjoy ourselves instead of both being damned bored."

Bob had to laugh, but was firm on that point. He was definitely not going to take money from Fatty. The latter was rather hurt at first, but soon saw Bob's point of view, and was his normal cheery self once more. Eventually he put in for two months' leave, and in June, left for home.

Bob was on his own again, and gradually gave way to self-pity, and started heavy drinking once more. This, besides doing him no good, did not help him to pay off his debts any the quicker. He had, however, discovered a

cheap brand of whisky, specially bottled for native consumption, and though it was filth, it helped him forget, and was dirt cheap. He still wrote every week to Margaret, cheerful loving letters.

* * *

At last Leslie came back from his course. Bob was very happy to see him again. He found him changed. Very distrait, and prone to gaze vacantly into the distance, looking rather like a sick sheep. Bob knew Leslie fairly well by now, and soon recognised the symptoms. He questioned him.

"Leslie", he said, "you look like an orang-outang searching for its mate. Who is she?"

Leslie was furious. He had hoped Bob would ask him what was the matter, and he looked upon himself as the hero of a hopeless beautiful romance, but Bob's description made it all look ridiculous.

"You really are a swine," he said angrily, "this is serious this time, and then you go saying something damned stupid just when I really am in love.

Bob laughed and said he was sorry. Leslie proceeded to pour out his heart. He was certainly in a mess. His new girl friend was looking after some children in a small cantonment near Poona. Leslie was very much in love with her, and had taken every opportunity

to see her. This had meant taxis at all hours of the day and night, and the bill was far more than he had any hope of ever paying.

"Oh, hell!" he complained, "what can one do? You get fond of a girl but can't entertain her on your pay. If you can't take her out, then someone else will, and then you might as well retire from the chase. If you do try to give her a good time, you get into debt. Look at me now! The taxi-man wants nearly three hundred chips, and God only knows what my Club bill is, as I took Anne there nearly every day."

He broke off and thought for a bit. Suddenly he turned round and said:

"What's the name of that moneylender chap you went to? I must get a thousand chips quickly."

Bob told him, and spent a useless five minutes trying to dissuade him from borrowing from that source. But it was useless, and he realised soon enough that Leslie was desperate.

"Look here, Bob," he said, "you'll admit there are only two alternatives for us on our pay nowadays. There is no middle course for us, as we either go the whole hog or nothing. I prefer to go the whole hog and have a decent time. It's either that or doing what you're doing now. Sitting alone, trying to live on your pay, liquidate your debts, and till you're a captain, live the life of a hermit."

He laughed unpleasantly, and then went on: "How can you stand doing this day after day? Don't you ever want to get away from Army surroundings, Army shop, trousers all round you? Don't you want to mix in feminine society?"

"You know I do, you blasted fool," Bob said. "But I'm over my ears in debt, and till September I've got to go on like this. You know as well as anybody how fed up I am, and how much I want a beat up."

"I'm sorry, old boy. It's just that I'm so fed up. I was a swine to throw it all up at you, but I'm damned upset about Anne. I can't expect her just to sit at home and mope while I'm here, so I have to get over to Poona to take her out somehow, and the moneylender is the only way. You know that means years of struggle afterwards," and he left the room.

For the next few weeks Leslie was away every week-end. He would return the following Monday in the early hours of the morning, heavy-eyed, dead tired, and morose. Bob eventually tackled him again on the subject, and found Leslie's debts were rapidly getting beyond his control. He didn't seem to care either, and was making no effort to pull up. He began to get the queer desperate look Bob knew so well—the look other people had noticed on his own face—the cornered expression of someone who perpetually owes money.

Eventually his attitude began to affect Bob. He saw Leslie going off and enjoying himself, and apparently still able to keep his head above water, and wondered what was the use of trying to get straight. He had nothing to save for, his marriage was off, and he had no ties of any sort. By not joining the Club he met no one, made no friends, and was getting the reputation of being unfriendly and of being a heavy secret drinker in the station. He decided to let matters slide along as best they could. He calculated that he could keep going on his loans and overdrafts till he was a Captain, and then was ample time to start thinking about paying off his debts from his increased salary.

Fatty was due back from leave in a few days, and Bob decided he would celebrate his new-found freedom by meeting his boat in Bombay, and throwing a party. He therefore put in for the week-end's leave, and Friday evening saw him in the train, bound for Bombay. He felt as excited as if he was going on holiday from school once more. It was the first time for four months he had even set foot outside the Ratanagar cantonments.

# CHAPTER X

In September Bob was sent on a Musketry Course. This was held in the hills of the Central Provinces in a station called Lalchandri, where most of the families came to escape the hot weather in the plains. It was very full in September, and the Club, as usual, was the centre of the social life of the station.

As there were about twenty-five other young officers on the course, it was rather a wild party, and little or no work was done. The Commandant made one or two pathetic attempts to stop the nightly parties which generally ended in breaking up the Mess, but no one took any notice of him at all, and the instructors cared perhaps least of all about enforcing discipline. They were content so long as their classes turned up in the mornings, and as for what happened out of hours, they followed a policy of live and let live.

Bob found Mark Fagen was also gracing the course with his presence, and was very pleased. He had not seen Mark since leaving the Loamshires, and so they had a great deal to talk about.

Out of the total of nearly forty officers, more than thirty were from the Indian Army,

and seemed to be about the hardest lot of drinkers ever collected in one spot together. The small minority of British Army present were submerged, and only allowed in the parties on sufferance. Rather a change for them, and bitterly resented by a young Loamshire Second-Lieutenant, who thought Bob and Mark would rather 'kotow' to him in gratitude for the happy days spent attached to his regiment.

In those days he was a few months senior to both of them, but with the nine months' seniority granted the Indian Army, they were now above him as full Lieutenants. This they explained carefully and unpleasantly to him. He was not pleased.

The first night of the Course was passed fairly respectably, as the entrance examination was being held next morning, and the majority of the students, having done no work for it, were a little apprehensive of the result. To fail meant being sent back to one's unit, and this was not likely to go down with a swing with one's colonel.

However, the examination was simpler than they had hoped for in their most optimistic moments. The only failure was an Indian, Ram Gopal Singh of the Shajanpur State Forces, who, through sheer nervousness lost his voice completely, and then when recovered a little could only gulp a few sentences in Hindustani. It was pathetic to see him. He knew the whole

musketry book off by heart, had worked for months, and in his examination terror forgot even his command of English. He left Lalchandri next day in great distress and crying bitterly over the disgrace he had brought on his little State Army. He was soon forgotten by the unfeeling youngsters he left behind him.

Bob, Mark, two other officers, Teddy Rowe and Jack Halliday of the 3rd Calcutta Grenadiers, together with a couple of British Service subalterns, soon made a drinking circle of their own at the Club, and every evening by seven they were firmly settled in their favourite corner.

After the first week-end which they devoted to seeing how the land lay, they started looking out for female society, and this was not difficult to obtain, as the place was full of either grass widows or unattached girls out from England. They were usually a hard-bitten lot, and had no false ideas as to what was wanted of them. They were not fooled for a moment. But they were all young, out for a good time, and so the whole crowd got on very well, and time passed happily enough. Being strong believers in the eleventh commandment, they took their pleasures where they could, and did not flaunt themselves too much before the public eye.

There were quite a few ideal bathing places nearby, surrounded by thick woods, but usually open enough to get the midday sun on them.

These were popular spots for picnics, and nearly every Sunday or Thursday, which were holidays, found some of the set picnicking and bathing.

By the time the mid-course week-end break arrived, Bob and Mark were heavily engaged in their "affaires," and when Bob asked the latter where they should go for the short holiday, Mark suggested that they get the girls to spend the week-end with them at the nearest Dak bungalow where they were not likely to be discovered. They decided on a little place about thirty-three miles away, where there was a river for bathing, and from where they could drive into Jubbulpore on the Saturday night for any dance or cinema there might be.

Bob's girl friend, Sally Princep, thought it was a great idea, and said she would fix up a tale to tell the friends she was staying with, and make it all right for Mark's girl, Jenny Rice, as well.

Sally was an extremely attractive young woman. Tall, athletic, and with a beautiful figure. She was fond of Bob in a way, but neither of them really meant anything to each other beyond finding in their own company a strong physical attraction. Mark and Jenny Rice, on the other hand, seemed to be almost in love, and Jenny proved rather difficult in the end to persuade to accompany the party. However, Friday afternoon came round at last and in an old hired car they went bowling and

rattling down the hill towards the little bungalow at Char.

Mark had written to the servants in charge of the bungalow, and dinner was being prepared when they arrived, so they decided to eat first, and bathe just before going to bed. Mark and Jenny seemed embarrassed when they spoke of 'bed', which was strange, considering it was Mark who had first suggested the whole outing, but Bob found later that though, like his own relations with Sally, Mark was not yet Jenny's lover, he was besides this, totally inexperienced, and was now rather regretting his boldness.

Bob was angry. "Dammit," he said, "you must have known what would happen if we came away, and anyhow Jenny's no virgin, so don't be a bloody fool."

However, by the time dinner was over, all appeared well, and Bob was relieved, as he had feared Mark's or Jenny's last minute scruples might have split up the party. He looked across at Sally. She was looking doubly attractive. In shorts, an open-necked coloured shirt, and bare legs, she was irresistible, and her subdued excitement and desire for him showed in her bright eyes and heightened colour. Bob felt impatient that he had ever worried about the other two.

Dinner over, Sally said she was tired and going to bed. Bob followed her in a few minutes. She was in the bathroom.

Bob said, "Can I come in?"

"Yes, darling," she called, "don't bother to order yours. It'll take ages to heat up more water. I'm terribly clean, so share mine."

So both squashed in together, and amid much splashing, managed to get fairly clean before going to bed.

Sally was wonderful. Young and passionate, she responded eagerly to Bob's caresses, and soon love gave way to the frightening mad beat of passion, till utterly satiated, they dropped off to sleep, tangled warmly in each other's arms.

With the morning light Bob woke, and for a moment did not know where he was. He turned over and saw Sally. He did not wake her. She was sleeping with her face cradled in the bend of her arm, turned slightly towards him. Her lips were parted. She was smiling a little in her sleep. Her beautiful firm young body was a poem of grace. He looked at her. Her white arms, her ivory teeth glimpsed between her parted lips, her firm full breasts which lay cupped in his hands, her long legs. He needed her terribly.

* * *

They bathed all morning, and after lunch drove into Jubbulpore for the evening. A dinner and dance was advertised at the Club, and it turned out to be a cheery affair, and it

was nearly three o'clock before they got home to the bungalow. They were due back in Lalchandri next day, and so the little break was nearly over. Bob and Sally could not seem to have enough of each other. She burned into him like a flame, and each seemed to draw the life-blood from the other. They were utterly contented after. Theirs was a union which left each completely satisfied both mentally and physically.

This relationship continued after they returned to Lalchandri, and was only broken when Sally had to return to Allahabad where her friends were staying. She was returning to England in March of the following year, and as Bob was due for leave, they planned to travel together on the same boat. He decided that, with his advance of pay plus a little borrowed from the Regimental Loan Fund, he could afford it. The tourist class fare was very cheap, and once home he would live free with his people. The moneylender would have to wait a couple of months for his instalments.

They both booked passages therefore on the S.S. "Marovia", an all-Tourist class boat, leaving Bombay early in March. Before then Sally promised she would manage somehow to get down to Ratanagar and see Bob, probably round about Christmas, or perhaps just after New Year. When they finally parted at Lalchandri, each felt completely lost without the other.

Ratanagar was quite gay for Christmas, and there were dances nearly every night at the Club, and now that Bob had joined again, he found the time passed more quickly and pleasantly than before. Leslie had asked his girl friend down for the week, and Bob now met her for the first time. She seemed quite nice, and it was evident that both were madly in love. It was a pity she lived so far from Ratanagar, as the weekly journeys Leslie was taking to go and see her were steadily putting him deeper and deeper into the financial mire.

He did not seem to worry in the least about it, and whenever a reminder came from his creditors, far from being upset about it, he would go to the opposite extreme, and probably throw a party. On such occasions he would invite every one to drink with him, saying:

"Come along, the party's on old Ramchand Tarachand," (mentioning his principal money-lender), "so drink all you can, and do the old b...r down."

Bob knew the state of mind well. He was rapidly approaching it himself. One felt the best years of one's life were in the twenties, and if one scrimped and struggled along on one's subaltern's pay, the first seven years were pretty miserable. Therefore, why worry? You only lived once. It all became a kind of game. You against your creditors. Who could play the other on his line the longest? There were

no rules. Nothing was barred. No subterfuge too low. Post-dated cheques; cheques wrongly dated; or words and figures not agreeing—done purposely to gain time—all was fair in the game of raising cash or credit somehow.

* * * *

Sally was due to arrive very soon. She had written that she would be down sometime after Christmas, probably for New Year, but Bob had written her to try to get her to come earlier, so they could have a good time with Leslie and his girl friend. Fatty too, after much argument eventually yielded to persuasion and invited Patricia to come and stay. She evidently preferred the delights of Bombay to those of Ratanagar for she refused. Fatty was extremely angry for once.

"There you are," he gobbled furiously. "Through you two bloody fools I've been made to look an ass. The damned girl now thinks I want to entice her up here and jump on her."

This was too much for Bob and Leslie. The picture of Fatty making passionate love was irresistible, and they collapsed laughing. He was mortally offended and for two days treated them with cold dignity till his natural good-humour asserted itself again, and he laughed as much as they did over it.

They eventually decided to ask the Greenways to come, and fixed a week-end immediately

after New Year. Sally would have come by then, and perhaps, as most of Bombay's festivities would be over by that date, Patricia would come too. Bob wrote and suggested it to Thelma. The answer came fairly promptly, and Fatty's ruffled pride received a sop when he heard Pat was coming after all.

The Greenways, Pat, Sally, and Leslie's girl friend Anne Spence, would all have to cram into the Ratanagar Dak bungalow somehow, and the three hosts went along to it and made elaborate arrangements.

"Nothing must go wrong," said Fatty smugly. "Nothing."

# CHAPTER XI

SALLY arrived a day earlier than the Greenways, and Bob went down to the station to meet her. She was very glad to see him again, and soon both were sitting in her room in the Dak bungalow discussing the leave plans. Sally said she had a single berth cabin, and laughed a lot when she heard that Bob, as he could only afford the cheapest rate, had to share with five others, though it did not really matter, as they had both decided to share her cabin.

That evening there was what was called a "Panatrope Dance" at the Club. In other words, an old radio-gramophone was used to play records usually three or four months out of date. But as there were generally some amusing parties collected, Bob and Sally decided to dine and dance there. They got hold of Fatty, and together with Leslie and Anne, went early to the Club. They hoped to meet a few people drinking before dinner and persuade them to come along too, and bring any new dance records they could get hold of with them.

The usual crowd was propping up the bar, and the endless chain of "short drinks" was being set up in front of them. Soon a large

ring had collected round a few small tables, and the party seemed set for the evening, and those who were still in sports kit hurried off to change, promising to return later and bring all the records they could.

The efforts of the Club cook were not very successful as far as producing dinner went, but no one minded very much. They were all far too 'merry' really to know what was being set in front of them, and as long as the drinks appeared on time, no one bothered much about food.

By now the panatrope had started, and quite a number of people were dancing. Bob and Sally were revolving round the floor together, and Leslie and Anne had disappeared into the garden. Fatty was drinking hard at the bar. With him were two subalterns, both very drunk indeed, and reaching that stage which was soon to lead to a fight.

It came soon, and the unfortunate native barman was the sufferer. He was given orders by the secretary not to serve them with more drink, and in a very frightened voice told them this news. The two drunks were flabbergasted, and then a dull fury came over them.

"You bloody little runt," one shouted, "give us the same again, or we'll damn well kill you."

"No, Sahib," pleaded the little barman, "hukm hai" (it is an order).

Action followed immediately. He was seized, dragged across the counter, his cries for help smothered, and then crammed into the ice-chest. The two assailants then helped themselves to a bottle of whisky and walked out.

Fatty, who had been an amazed spectator of this scene, rushed to let the barman out, but found the ice-box had a patent type of lock, and the key was evidently inside it in the victim's pockets. He ran for help, and eventually the box was broken open, and the barman rescued. He had been shut up for nearly fifteen minutes, and was in a state of collapse, very nearly frozen to death. But after several brandies, which he was not used to, he seemed quite all right, and after several more looked on the whole affair as a joke, which was lucky for the culprits, who might well have had to face a serious charge.

The next day the Greenways arrived, and with them came Patricia. Fatty was very pleased, and dashed about making their rooms comfortable, and generally getting in everyone's way.

Three very pleasant days followed, with dances every night, picnics and bathing when it was warm enough, and generally polo to watch, or tennis and golf to play in the afternoons.

When the time came to say good-bye, Bob and Sally did not mind so very much, for their return journey to England was fixed up, each knew the other was by now deeply in love, and

this allowed of a far greater sense of security than when sheer physical attraction was their only bond.

"And anyhow, darling," said Sally, as she kissed him good-bye, "in less than sixty days now we'll be on the boat, and then we'll be with each other all the time. And sixty days is not long, darling, is it?"

To Bob it seemed sixty years, but he gravely assured her it was no time at all, and she smiled happily once more. In the meantime they could write every day and telephone as often as they had enough funds. So both felt happy.

# CHAPTER XII

In February Bob's report came from the Musketry School at Lalchandri. He had rather dreaded its arrival, for if it was a bad one, coming so near his leave, it might affect his chances of getting away. Luckily for him it only mentioned his work, which proved above the average, and not a word about the frequent parties that had taken place. The Colonel seemed pleased with him, and Bob's leave appeared fairly secure. There were now only three weeks left to get through, and unless he featured in some major social disaster, nothing could prevent him sailing.

At last his day of departure came, and he saw Ratanagar station receding into the distance with, as he put it, "the train going in the right direction." He could not realise that at last he was getting out of India, and for three months would be spared the nightly shop talked in Mess, the stupid vindictive gossip as bad as that of any collection of old women, and above all, not even see the sight of a uniform, much less wear one, for over ninety days.

He tried to picture England, Sussex where his home was. It was too far back to seem

real any more. When he tried to picture his parents, their faces appeared in his mind as general vague outlines. He then began to think of all his friends in jobs at home, and wondered what the four years had done for them. It would be fun meeting all the old crowd again. They could have some good parties together, and he felt they would like Sally too, as she was going to stay at his home for a couple of weeks. The future seemed very rosy to Bob as he day-dreamed in his carriage.

Early next morning the train reached Bombay, and after breakfast at the Taj, Bob went round to his agents to see if his passage was finally arranged, and to draw what cash he had left for the voyage. He made sure he had all his papers correct, his passport, his vaccination certificate. The boat sailed at noon, so he had little time to get all his work done, especially as the medical inspection was an hour earlier.

He was given his ticket at the shipping counter, and then with a sinking feeling went over to the banking department. He wondered what money he had left. The young man behind the counter knew Bob, and grinned at him when he rather sheepishly asked, "have I anything at all?"

The answer was reassuring, in fact, Bob couldn't believe it at first.

"You drew three months' advance of pay," he was told, and after deducting three loan repayments, your Mess bill, and ticket, you have forty-seven quid left."

It seemed a vast sum, especially as he drew it all in pound notes.

"That's more than I expected, old boy," he told the clerk, "and as I live free at home, it should be O. K. unless I drink myself mad on the boat. Anyhow, the old man hasn't seen me for four years, and may stump up a bit extra. Cheerio! I'm off now," and hailing a taxi, he drove to Ballard Pier where the boat was tied up alongside.

The medical examination was only a mere formality, and in a few minutes he was climbing the gangway, and there was Sally waving to him from the top deck. She ran down to meet him and was terribly happy he had arrived.

"You know, darling," she said, "when it got to a quarter past eleven I began to wonder if you'd missed the train or something awful. But it's all right now, you've come."

Bob kissed her and told her to wait for him in the bar.

"The Greenways are coming to see us off, and so is Cyril Newcombe. They have probably arrived by now, so run along and talk to them, darling, and I'll pop down and stick these bags in my cabin. I'll be along in less than ten minutes."

Sally went along to the bar, and Bob started off in search of his cabin. When he found it he had a terrific shock. It was right in the stern on the bottom deck. had no port-hole, and was about the size of a large dog-kennel. He had a wild desire to shriek with laughter when he saw it. It was impossible to imagine six grown people in it, and as for their luggage, it could only remain in the passage. There was only one fan, and a chest of drawers, wardrobe and wash-basin. This for six men. He wondered what it would be like in the hot weather, but, as he said to himself philosophically, "What can one expect for £30?"

He left his suitcase on his bunk—luckily he had a lower berth—and went back to find Sally. When he arrived in the bar, it was so full of friends seeing people off that it was quite a few minutes before he saw her waving to him from a table at which were the Greenways, Cyril, and also Patricia.

He sat down, and when he at last managed to catch the eye of the harassed steward, ordered another round of drinks. He then described his cabin, and was greeted with shouts of disbelief, and in the end they all trooped down to see it. Thelma Greenway couldn't stop laughing when they all were inside it. There was not a square inch of room left.

"Bobbie, however are you all going to dress or undress in here? You simply can't all get up at the same time."

"We'll make out a roster," he announced. "Then we can take it in turns to get up first. Here's the cabin steward, I'll ask him who else is in with me."

"Well, sir," said the steward, whose name appeared to be Dainty, calling for more giggling from Sally and Thelma, "there's you, sir, and two other officers. That's three. Then there's a jockey, and a harbour pilot, and I can't rightly say 'oo the sixth gentleman is."

"Oh God, that's enough," cried Cyril. "It sounds like a zoo already. Come on, let's get back to the bar."

Bob received much sympathy from everyone, but as Sally pointed out, it was an all-Tourist boat, so they could use all the public rooms, and there was always her cabin, so Bob didn't have to spend so very much time in his overcrowded den.

Thelma was still laughing. "Oh dear—fancy if you are all tight and try to get to bed. Three officers, a pilot, the jockey, and probably the sixth is an Indian." She collapsed in hysterics.

Just then the gong went, and a steward looked into the bar and called, "All friends ashore, please." There were hurried orders all round for last drinks, and the bar gradually thinned out.

"Remember last time we did this?" asked Cyril. "You were one of the 'all friends ashore please' bunch then."

Bob laughed. He remembered it, and knew how they all felt.

Soon the last few stragglers were ashore, and were waving from the dock. The ship showed no signs of sailing, and a deck-hand told Bob it would be at least another hour before she left. He ran down the gangway and told the Greenways, Pat, and Cyril not to wait, and so they drove away.

He and Sally then went down to the saloon and interviewed the Chief Steward, who was allotting seats at meals. They managed to get two seats at a small table for four at the 'second sitting' of each meal. They were lucky really, as most of the tables were for parties of about ten or twelve, and also there was usually a rush to get allotted the 'second sitting', as the hours for meals at 'first sitting' were absurd. Breakfast half-past seven, lunch at twelve, and dinner at seven. Sally and Bob, more through her vamping the middle-aged and susceptible Chief Steward than anything else, were therefore very comfortable. They ate at their ease, an hour later.

Suddenly the siren hooted, and they felt the engines throb under their feet. They dashed upstairs to see the last of India drawing astern.

The dock was already nearly fifty feet away, and this gap was increasing steadily as the four tugs puffed and snorted as they pulled and pushed at the sides of the liner. Like fussy little hens they manœuvred her gradually into position, signalling to each other with frantic toots till it seemed their engines would burst, but at last they seemed satisfied they had got her into position, and drawing away, left her heading out of the harbour under her own power.

Sally and Bob hung over the side gazing at the shore. They could still make out the tiny figure of a little Chinese boy who juggled with plates and all sorts of knick-knacks, and who saw off every boat and reaped a large reward from the happy and therefore generous leave-goers who watched his antics from the decks.

Soon the boat was steaming past the Taj Mahal Hotel. Bob could picture the less lucky people than he, probably watching them from the verandah windows. The sun was shining brightly on to the water-front, and figures of men and women hurrying along could easily be distinguished against the bright background, and the electric horns of cars going along the Apollo Bunder sounded very close and distinct.

Bob heaved a sigh of relief. He looked at Sally. "I can't believe I'm really getting away. It's wonderful, isn't it?"

She squeezed his arm affectionately. "I know, darling, but in a way, wouldn't you be

sorry if you knew you weren't ever coming back? India somehow means quite a lot, doesn't it? It sort of gets a hold in your inside thoughts. I can't explain it properly, darling."

Bob knew what she meant. He realised too that he would always in the end come back. But at the moment he wanted to go home, to speak only his own tongue, and to know everyone he met or jostled on the pavements was white.

They went slowly down to lunch, where they found their fellow diners had not yet arrived at the table. Bob suddenly laughed out loud. Sally looked at him questioningly.

"I suddenly had a mental picture of the old moneylender chap tearing his hair when he gets my letter saying I'm off home," he told her.

Sally looked worried. "I wish you didn't owe so much money, darling," she said.

Bob assured her he was even then getting his affairs straightened out. She soon cheered up, and just then their two table companions arrived for lunch. They were Australians, both young, and going to England, to which they constantly referred as 'the old country', for their honeymoon.

Soon all four were chatting gaily, and the Fairmiles, as they turned out to be—John and Mary Fairmile—pointed out to Sally and Bob all the people they knew travelling on the boat.

They were certainly a motley collection in the saloon, and Mary Fairmile's descriptions and stories about them were very funny. She described the various 'affaires' going on up to the moment, and noticing Sally's and Bob's embarrassment, laughed.

"Oh, you two are just too obviously in love," she said, but as she and John were so newly married, and so clearly still in love themselves, it seemed natural to let them know everything, and when after lunch, Sally and she went off together, Bob knew Sally was going to tell her they were lovers. He learnt from her later at tea-time that they strongly approved.

Towards the end of lunch a most odd figure appeared in the doorway. Tall and thin he was, with a most ravaged elderly face, but standing straight up in wavy disorder was a head of startlingly bright yellow hair. He was obviously an old man, but his locks were those more suited to a boy of ten. He was dressed in immaculate white flannel trousers, and wore a violently striped blazer. Unfortunately, though it was clear he had dressed with extreme care, he had omitted to put on a shirt, so his wrinkled old chest peered through his open coat.

Bob noticed quite a few people smiling, and others—the staider element—looking angrily at the old man, who was carefully picking his way through the tables to his place, stepping high like a mettlesome horse.

"Who is that ?" he asked John.

John laughed. "Oh, that's a famous character. He is a sheep-owner in New Zealand, a multi-millionaire, and the talk of the ship. Daddy Poots we call him. Damned nice old boy. Very kind-hearted, funny, and pleasant company. The poor old devil really does try to knock off a bit, but you can see he is pretty tight already. He is semi-tight all day, but by midnight he is usually pretty bad. Never objectionable, though. You'll like him. We all do except some bloody elderly people, as you see."

"Is his name really 'Poots' or did you make it up?"

"No, that is his name. He is of Dutch descent, and damned proud of it too. Actually he is going home on a combined business and pleasure trip. His first trip for nineteen years, and that was to go to the war. He joined up as a private, and got to Sergeant with a D.S.M. in Gallipoli".

"What's he drink all day?" asked Bob.

"Guinness," was the astonishing reply. "Gallons and gallons of it all day long. Where he puts it all I don't know. Now and again, very very occasionally, a whisky. But that knocks him out."

'Daddy' had reached his table, which was two away from Bob's, and solemnly studied

the menu. The steward, who was apparently used to this elaborate pretence, waited politely for the order. You could see he liked the old man and was trying to help him out and protect him from the vindictive glances and almost audible remarks being made by some people nearby.

'Daddy' read the menu right through, then turned to the steward.

"A little too hot for food this weather, steward. I don't feel hungry today. Just bring me a little Guinness."

The steward agreed it was warm, repeated the order gravely, and went away.

"It's pathetic really," said Mary. "That happens every meal. He only comes down to show people he is all right, poor old man."

"Don't be so serious, poppet," said John. "He knows all of us like him, and he is a happy old devil really and loves our parties.'

Mary still said she thought him "too sad" and "rather sweet really".

# CHAPTER XIII

THAT night there was a dance on the sports deck. The idea of it was to give the old voyagers, who had travelled all the way from Australia, a chance of getting to know the large number of new people who had got on at Bombay.

Mary Fairmile told Sally that the Bombay crowd was hated on these boats by the Australians. Even the ship's officers had warned them against the "bloody Army people who would get on board at Bombay". Sally was rather indignant for, as she said, "I do think we might be given a chance without being condemned even before we embark."

They assured her that the real reason of the warning was jealousy.

Sally asked. "Why?"

"Well, said Mary, "the boat is almost empty from Sydney to Bombay, and the ship's officers have the pick of the young women on board. Then at Bombay there is the terrific influx of young men going home on leave, mostly Army officers, and you know how a title goes down with us Colonials—the ship's officers don't stand a chance."

"Whatever do you mean by a 'title'?" asked Sally, bewildered.

"Oh well, Lieutenant," said Mary—she pronounced it Lootenant—, "or Captain. Something like that."

Sally understood at last. "But do you dislike us too?" she asked.

Mary thought for a while before answering. "Not individually, Sally dear," she said. Singly we like you very much, but as a whole, say as a nation, we hate the English. You are so insultingly condescending to us 'Colonials'."

Sally was very surprised, but it just then crossed her mind to wonder where Bob was, so she suggested to Mary they should go in search of the absentees, as John also had not yet turned up to dance.

They found them in the middle of a large circle of drinkers. 'Daddy' Poots was in the chair and holding forth in great style. His yellow hair standing on end, he was thumping the table, and laying down the law about something or other. Nearly everyone was laughing more with him than at him, and he was very pleased with himself.

Sally tried to get Bob to come out on deck and dance, but he was, enjoying himself too much where he was and told her he would join her in a few minutes. She and Mary left them, and returned to the deck.

"I can't stand that awful smell of stale beer and whisky in there," Mary said. "and I know we may as well give up hope of seeing any of them again tonight. Once they really get down to it, they won't even stop when the bar closes."

"But they'll have to," said Sally. "If the bar is closed, what can they do?"

Mary laughed. "Just before time they buy a bottle of whisky each, about six dozen bottles of soda, and only end up when it's daybreak."

Sally assured her Bob was not like that, and he would be out on deck in a very short time. The tactful Mary said nothing, nor did she remark on his absence again when at one o'clock a tearful Sally bade her good-night and went off to her cabin alone.

Mary was very angry. She went back to the bar, and completely lost her temper with John and Bob. If she had not been so furious she would have laughed at the fuddled consternation the whole party showed on their faces. They could not realise their offence, but saw vaguely that something was wrong. All were very polite, and tried to press a drink on her. She refused, and managed to get the two culprits out on deck. There she gave them a strong lecture. Bob was very upset.

"There is poor little Sally crying in her cabin," she told him. "She waited all the

evening for you, and refused to dance with anyone else in case you came out. What a wonderful start to the voyage she so looked forward to! You reek of whisky—both of you—go and get tidy, brush your teeth, and find her and say you are sorry."

Bob did as he was told, and then, very nervous, went to find Sally. He knocked at her door and got no answer, so quietly opened it and slipped in. He thought she must be asleep.

Sally was sitting up in her bed, trying to look angry, but failing dismally. All she could do when he said how sorry he was, and begged her to forgive him, was to burst into tears. He was more upset than ever, and tried to comfort her.

"I looked forward so much to this boat," she sobbed, "and the very first night you go and leave me alone, and drink for hours and hours with that beastly drunken lot upstairs. I hate you. I wish I had never come. I don't want ever to see you again," she added, clinging to him unhappily.

At last she stopped crying and smiled at him tearfully. He was forgiven. They were happy again, and all was harmony in the little cabin.

"Hurry up, darling," she said, "I'm tired. Do come to bed, it's nearly two o'clock."

It was rather a squash in the little bunk, but they were quite content, and exhausted by the emotional strain of their lovers' quarrel, were soon asleep, held tightly in each other's arms.

Next morning fairly early he went back to his own cabin, and was thankful for the comforts of Sally's when he saw how small his looked with five snoring figures in it. He got quietly into bed, and a few minutes later found the steward bringing in the morning tea.

His companions awoke, and were inclined to show some curiosity as to where he had spent the night. He told them he had slept on deck, and intended to every night.

"It's much cooler than this," he told them, "and quite a few people were sleeping up there besides me."

He was easily believed, as this practice was quite a common one, especially among those like himself who had to share cabins with three or four others.

Just then the Harbour Pilot began to wake up. His groans and curses were frightful. Announcing to the whole cabin he felt terrible, he staggered to the basin where he gargled, spat, and cleared his throat for some minutes. It was most unpleasant, and he was quickly told to go and be sick elsewhere. He did not seem to mind, but apologised and climbed back into his bunk.

The little jockey then emerged from under his bunk. He was greeted with cries of: "Where the devil have you been, Tich?" They all liked him, he was such a minute and cheery little man.

"Oh well," he explained, "last night I was so tiddly I couldn't climb into the top bunk. Too small, you see. So I slept on the floor."

Bob therefore told him he could take his, which was a lower berth.

The question of getting up was soon solved, and one by one they washed and dressed. The only way, they discovered quite early on in the voyage, that they could keep a count of their own clothes was to fold them up as they undressed, and put them in the bunk during the night while they slept. There was no room to hang anything up, or put away half one's kit. Bob decided to ask Sally if he could put some bags in her cabin. It would leave a little more space in theirs.

He had arranged to bathe with her before breakfast, and so got into his swimming suit, and went aft to where a large canvas tank was rigged up. Only a few other passengers were there, but later one or two more appeared. Sally arrived late, wearing a tiny little two-piece green suit, and looking very sweet and fresh.

There was no more mention of Bob's crimes of the night before. All was well again, and

they splashed about happily for nearly an hour, then got out to dress and go in to breakfast.

Bob and Sally soon found out the various little cliques and sets there were on board. Being an all-Tourist ship there was a very mixed crowd travelling home. But usually the rougher elements kept together, and showed as little desire to meet the Army set as the latter did them.

Mary and John Fairmile knew some nice people, and usually they all played deck-games or swam and had short drinks before meals together.

The most amusing circle was that in which old Daddy Poots held the chair. It consisted of two young subalterns going home on short leave and out to spend as much money as they could get rid of in the shortest possible time, Tich O'Lone the jockey, two dirt-track riders, one of whom was Australian, and the other a naturalised Swede, the harbour pilot, two planters from Malaya, and of course Daddy Poots.

Bob was usually with them, and sometimes Sally and Mary also. John Fairmile was a regular visitor. Sally found their parties very amusing till about dinner time, when she found they got too rough, and usually she and Mary never joined the circle after tea. It was uncommon for anyone even to have a slight head in the early mornings, for what with the sea

air, violent exercise, and early bathes indulged in, one always felt fit.

This could not be said to apply to Daddy Poots. In the early hours before the bar opened he was a pitiable sight. He shook so violently it made one wonder if he would drop to bits. He generally kept to his cabin till ten o'clock, as he knew he looked dreadful before he got his muscles and nerves under control, and this he found impossible until he had had two or three glasses straight off.

At ten o'clock exactly he would have his bottle of Guinness in front of him, but when it was poured out by the barman, he would find his hands shook so violently that he was unable to lift it to his lips. He would then look furtively round the room, and if no one was watching, bend down and put his lips to the glass, then tilting it firmly against his mouth, get both hands on to it, and drink it in great gulps.

After his third glass he was quite all right, and would sally forth on deck and make polite conversation with anyone who would listen. Usually he picked one of his most severe critics, and would purposely talk to some old lady to try and show her he was sober, and tell her all about his wife, home, and little girl. He would end by convincing her what a nice old man he was, only to ruin all his good work by being very drunk by dinner time again.

# CHAPTER XIV

THE ship did not stop at Aden, but was due to call in at Port Sudan instead. This meant a stretch of nearly a week from Bombay without sighting land, with every likelihood of the passengers becoming exceedingly bored, and tired of each other's company. Bob and Sally did not mind, as they did not care where they were so long as they were together. Nor did the few really hard drinkers on board, for they felt the bar was the same on the sea or in port, so long as the spirit flowed and their money lasted.

However, the usual "Sports Committee" was started, and the inevitable man who considered himself the 'life and soul' of the ship made his appearance. Life now became far less peaceful and pleasant, for through sheer desperation Bob and Sally consented to go in for various sports, really to be left alone, but found it was infinitely worse.

They were never left alone for a moment. Just as they settled down to read or talk, one or other's partner in some game would appear, and announce that their opponents were waiting and they simply must play now. Both were delighted when at last they were knocked out

of the competitions. Especially as it was getting increasingly hot as they entered the Red Sea.

It was now that the oddest clothes appeared. Sally used to wear what she told Bob was a 'play suit'. She looked to him very sweet in it, and as she had a lovely young lithe figure, it suited her very well. Others were not so fortunate. Every variety of shorts and trousers were produced by females of all ages. Some of the very wide-legged and dangerously abbreviated shorts left, as Bob pointed out to Sally, absolutely nothing to the imagination. "But" as he added, "probably that's the idea."

Sally rose in defence of her sex. "You're disgusting, darling" she rated him. "You all imagine that all we think of is how to attract men. Actually we dress to please ourselves and be comfortable."

Bob laughed at her. "All right then, darling, why do you ask me what dress shall you wear in the evening?"

"Don't be silly," she snapped. "What you and I do is quite another thing."

She changed the subject by asking him what they would do at Port Sudan. Bob suggested a bathe.

"There is a wonderful bathing pool there, just near the hotel, the Red Sea Hotel. It says on the board that we get in at four o'clock and don't sail again till nine, so shall we go to the

swimming place first, and then dance and have dinner at the hotel?

Sally thought that sounded attractive, and agreed to the programme, except that she suggested bringing the Fairmiles along too. Bob had no objection to this, so Sally suggested to Mary that they should all go ashore together.

The boat was an hour late in arriving next day, and it was nearly half-past five before they were bathing ashore. However, the water was wonderfully warm, and they had tea in their bathing suits sitting on the edge of the pool. It began to get chilly as the sun went down, so they dressed and walked up to the hotel. There they sat on the terrace, drank cocktails, and enjoyed the lovely cool night breeze coming down from the mountains behind them. From where they sat they could see the "Marovia", and as it got darker, lights appeared in the port-holes till soon she was a mass of twinkling stars, looking almost unreal, floating in the darkness between the sky and sea.

There were quite a few fellow passengers also at the hotel, but as Port Sudan had nothing very exciting in the way of 'sights' to offer tourists, the majority had stayed on board. However, quite a number of couples were dancing in the dining-room where there was a large central polished area, with the tables all round it. The music was coming from a very good radio-gramophone.

It was a pleasant change from the ship's food, and dinner was much nicer, as everything tasted fresh. At nine they got into a taxi, and drove back. It felt rather odd being on board again, even after so short a stay ashore, but they had all enjoyed it, and went along to the smoke-room, as it was still too early for bed.

It presented a very gay scene. Just as those ship-dwellers had gone ashore for a change of air, so had the few residents of Port Sudan, the odd half-dozen or so European men and women, come on board to get a little feeling of home. In the short time the boat had been in port, the women had had their hair done by the ship's barber, and bought clothes and scent and all sorts of knick-knacks from the shop. The men were in the smoke-room rounding off their dinner in the saloon with a long series of liqueurs. The big mail boats only called there once a month, and in the desolation of Port Sudan, its arrival was eagerly looked forward to. Like the Bombay crowd too, they stayed on board till the very last minute, having to be reminded three or four times by the steward that they had better move.

At Port Said Sally told Bob she was going shopping with Mary, and he was not to come with her. He wondered vaguely what she wanted to do that he could not take part in, but did not worry much about it. Probably some intimate feminine secret she only wanted Mary to know.

So Bob and John Fairmile collected Daddy Poots, Tich O'Lone, and a couple of other men, and set out in search of fun. Daddy was very interested in all he saw, but refused point blank to be inveigled into going into Arab Town.

They ended up in a small café, where they were besieged by the usual crowd of pimps and touts. Eventually a photographer arrived, and pestered them so much that they eventually agreed Daddy would be the victim. The man, realising a joke was on, said he would take Daddy in a new pose, and unravelled a canvas screen with a hole cut in it. He showed it to Bob. Daddy was not allowed to look, nor for that matter was he sufficiently interested.

The screen was set up, Daddy stuck his face through the hole, and in a few minutes a finished copy was handed to him for approval. He gave a startled grunt, and then laughed as heartily as anyone else. He was delighted with it. There he was, leering drunkenly down through a ship's port-hole, at a very fat lady having a bath. They all bought copies, and told Daddy they were going to his wife. He was very pleased, and took it as a great compliment.

The photographer was as pleased as any of them. He had not had such a large sale for many a long day, and so they all parted the best of friends, he having been pressed to have drinks with them, escorting them back to the boat.

Their arrival could hardly pass unnoticed. Most of the passengers were leaning over the side watching the antics of the bumboat men alongside, when the party hove in sight. The photographer led, with his tripod and other apparatus over his shoulder, with his free arm embracing Daddy, the cause of his good fortune, affectionately. That worthy, as happy as he had been for years, was singing some frightful song he had learned in the days of his ill-spent youth, and now and again fell flat on his face as he tripped over some obstacle he could not see. He would have managed better had he removed the photographer's black velvet hood from over his head which, hanging down over his eyes, effectively prevented him seeing anything at all.

Bob saw to his dismay that Sally was watching the scene. He hoped she would not notice him, though it was unlikely he would escape. Somehow they got Daddy up the gangway, and managed to shake off the photographer, who remained waving and shouting from the pontoon bridge until the movement of it being unhitched from the side of the boat threw him into the water.

Bob tried to sneak off without Sally seeing him, but he had no luck. She enticed him down into her cabin with a flow of friendly prattle, but the moment they were alone, she started scolding him.

"You're hopeless, darling, really hopeless," she told him. "I can't even let you out of my sight for a moment without you getting mixed up with some awful crowd, and causing a scene."

Bob thought of what seemed to him a brilliant excuse. "Well, darling," he said, "when you told me you didn't want me to go ashore with you, I was very hurt. I didn't say so at the time in case I spoiled your outing, but I was very hurt," he repeated it smugly, "and so I went ashore with Daddy Poots".

He looked at her to see if his explanation was a good one. He saw he had convinced her, but immediately afterwards felt very guilty and conscience-stricken.

"Oh, darling," said the contrite Sally, "I never thought you'd mind so much but I couldn't let you come with us as I went to buy you this as a surprise," and she held out a small flat packet. "You see, I'd ordered it by air mail from Bombay, and went to Simon Arzt to fetch it today. I was going to give it to you tonight, but you look too sad, and I've been horrid to you, so you can have it now."

He felt dreadful, as really he hadn't minded her going at all, and had thoroughly enjoyed his morning.

"Go on, darling—open it!" Sally was jumping about on the bunk watching him.

He undid the parcel, and found a silver cigarette case with, engraved in her writing inside the lid, "From Sally 1936".

She was absurdly happy to see how affected he was by the present, and they both went up on deck again, more firmly convinced than ever that no one had ever been so in love before as they were. And so the remaining four days to Marseilles passed very happily, Bob behaving as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

He and Sally decided to fly home from Marseilles. The exchange was in their favour, and as Bob only had a short time at home, they thought the week saved by not going round by sea easily worth the little extra cost. Actually they got a small refund of passage money, and that, added to what they probably would have spent during the extra week signing 'chits', just about equalised the ticket by air.

As the boat was late again into port, they found they had missed the morning plane, but were informed by the Air France agent that a bus would call for them next day. He asked, would they be staying on board, or did they intend spending the night at an hotel? They decided to sleep ashore, and, driving into the town, booked a large double room at the Hotel de Nouailles.

It was very nice to be off the boat at last, and that evening they went and danced and had

supper at a night club called the Embassy near the hotel. The dancing space was only a few feet square, and made of glass through which rose-coloured lights were shining. The band was good, and played as if their lives depended on it. Sally and Bob enjoyed the evening, but, feeling tired, went back to the hotel early.

While Sally had her bath, Bob was getting her suitcase and his packed for the journey next day. They were only allowed thirty-three pounds in the plane, and as their heavy baggage was going by train, they had to decide what to take with them for the next four or five days. She was giving him instructions as to what she needed, and what to pack. He was doing his best, but now and again had to go in and ask her if he had the right garment or not. She was very severe with him when he was wrong, and with irritating smugness told him, from the depths of a comfortable warm bath, that he ought to know by now what clothes she needed.

Bob knew she was teasing him, so next time came in and, seizing her under her arms dragged her out and spanked her, all wet as she was, with her own hair-brush, and told her he had packed enough. Off she went, wrapped in a large towel, to finish off her own suitcase, and soon everything was ready for the morning departure, and they went to bed.

* * *

In the morning the Air France bus called for them at eight o'clock, and soon they were climbing the hilly road behind Marseilles towards the Marignam aerodrome which lay beyond Aix. Sally had never flown before, and was inclined to be nervous when she saw the big machine standing on the tarmac. Bob assured her it was all right, and when they were sitting side by side in the big cabin, she seemed happier about the journey, and quite excited at the prospect, but when they started to move, she nevertheless clutched Bob's hand tightly for the first few minutes.

Soon, however, the novelty of the view from the windows entranced her, and she forgot her fears. By now they were flying over the Alpes Maritimes, and the morning sun turned the snow-covered slopes into every colour of the rainbow, and an hour later the plane came down at Lyons for a halt of fifteen minutes. Sally and Bob went along to the restaurant and had a late second breakfast of chocolate and rolls, and soon were in the air once more, and heading for Paris.

After a short halt there they changed planes, and in an hour were over the Channel. They passed over Hastings, and Bob had his first view of England for nearly four years. He was not in the least thrilled about it, as now it was getting so near the time of parting from Sally, though even for so short a time, both were depressed and very silent.

At Croydon they kissed good-bye, and she took the train for London where her people lived. Bob was going to the South Coast. He had wanted Sally to come very soon, in fact almost immediately, to stay with him, but she was firm.

"No, darling," she said. "You must let your people have you for at least a week to themselves. They'd hate me if I came now."

Bob saw she was right, and reluctantly let her have her own way. He said he would telephone her that night, and they could then arrange what was the best time for her to come to stay.

In an hour he was stepping out of the train on to West Hove platform and, finding no one there to meet him, got a taxi and gave the man his home address. As he passed through the familiar streets, he saw nothing very much had altered, and he began to feel he had never left the place at all.

The taxi drew up outside his home. The drive gates were open, and as he walked up to the door, he felt an overwhelming feeling of depression. He felt a complete stranger.

# CHAPTER XV

His mother had heard him coming up the drive, and had opened the front door and was waiting for him. She looked very small to Bob and, as he got nearer, much older.

"Hullo, Bob, my dear," she said, as she reached up to kiss him. "We did not expect you before tomorrow, as we thought you were coming by rail across France. Dad is down the town, and Mary" (his sister) "has taken Judy down to the dancing class."

He asked how Judy, his elder sister's child, was getting on. This sister was in Ceylon, and the baby had been sent home to school. In the holidays she lived with her grand-parents.

"Judy is getting very pretty," said his mother, as she led him upstairs to his bedroom, "and is now looking very like her mother. Poor Sylvia, she must miss her baby in Ceylon."

They went into his room. On the bed were a few little parcels. His mother said they were surprises for him. He opened them, and found Mary had knitted him a pullover, which he put on at once as he was feeling the cold, his father a new pipe, and his mother a leather golf jacket.

He was rather overwhelmed by it all, as being away from home for so long had made him unused to little attentions, and he had grown not to expect them any more.

"Judy wants to give you her present herself," his mother told him, "but I'd better prepare you for it, or you may be surprised and disappoint her. She is mad on glass now, and whenever a birthday or Christmas comes along, she rifles her money-box and goes down to Woolworths and buys a little piece of it. Your present is a sherry glass. She chose it herself this morning."

She left him to wash and tidy up, telling him that some tea would be ready for him in about ten minutes. He was glad to be alone; he felt so keyed up, and wanted to analyse his emotions. He felt rather flat. Everything was just the same. His room had his old pictures in it, even the chest of drawers was undisturbed. There were his notebooks, diaries, old letters. He might never have been away. A sense of great content gradually came over him. He was home. He belonged somewhere.

The door opened, and his father walked in. He had hardly changed at all. Perhaps a little more grey round the temples, but otherwise the same big, good-looking, kindly person he was before. They shook hands, and his father asked about his trip across France. Bob said it had been very comfortable, and that the general

impression people had of French planes being unsafe was incorrect. They were fast, comfortable, and quiet. In his own opinion, infinitely better than the slow but safe old machines that Imperial Airways ran in those days across to Paris.

They went down together to the drawing-room where tea had been laid for Bob by the fat Austrian maid. She and the cook, both fellow countrywomen, were waiting in the hall to meet him. He had seen neither before, and thought their shy curtseys and pleasant manner much preferable to the unfriendly average English servant.

As he drank his tea, the same blend of China and Indian mixed that they had always had and he liked so much, his life in India seemed so unreal. He felt he had never even been there.

Just then his sister Mary came in. She had grown up since he last saw her, and was now nearly twenty-one. She was very beautiful in a cold, aloof way, and as he kissed her, he realised the kid he had played with and with whom he had shared all his secrets, was gone for ever. He could never confide in this self-possessed young woman, and found it hard to imagine her feeling sentimental, or condoning his love and life with Sally.

He saw Judy hiding behind the door, too shy to meet, him. He called to her, and along

she came, holding out her little present to him. It was done up in red tissue paper, and tied with blue ribbon to look like a cracker. She had done it herself, she told him.

"How beautiful!" Bob exclaimed. "It really seems a shame to open it. You *are* a clever girl."

She was very pleased. "Oh no, Uncle Bob," she said, with a great air of casualness, "you can open it. I can make millions and trillions of crackers if I like."

He knew it had taken her a great deal of trouble, but his admiration of it had amply repaid her. She watched him anxiously as he unwrapped the glass, then became overwhelmed with confusion as he thanked her for it. For her it was the high light of the evening. Her little face, usually much too serious for a child of her age, barely six years old, broke into a large smile of happiness.

They all sat round watching him have his tea, and asking him all about himself. Gradually the air of awkwardness disappeared, and the same old family circle he knew so well and had subconsciously missed in India, reasserted itself.

He had promised to telephone Sally between eight and nine o'clock, and wondered how he could tell his people about her. It was not so much that he was afraid they would object, but that he felt they might feel a little hurt if the

first day he was home, he started making arrangements to, as they might think, go and stay away somewhere. Luckily his mother gave him the opening for which he had been waiting.

"Did you meet anyone you liked on the boat, dear?" she asked. "Anyone you'd like to have down here?"

"As a matter of fact I did," he replied, "but not on the boat exactly. A girl I knew in Lalchandri, when I was on the Course last year, happened to come back on the same boat as I did —the 'Marovia'. I'd like to ask her down for a few days some time. She is very nice."

It was rather queer, but he felt certain that, though it was his mother who had suggested it herself, she was not very pleased to hear of his wanting Sally down. He got the impression that her question had been asked out of curiosity alone, and was not meant to be taken up as far as the latter half of it went. However, both she and his sister seemed interested to know what Sally was like, and eventually they decided to ask her down for a few days in about a week's time. Bob said, wouldn't it be better if they definitely fixed a date at once to avoid disappointment? He saw out of the corner of his eye that Mary seemed faintly amused.

"All right, dear," said his mother, sensing trouble, "I'll write myself tomorrow and ask her for a week from the 21st. That gives you eight days to settle down and look around, and then

there will still be nearly a fortnight left afterwards before you sail."

Bob was very grateful to her.

He did not quite know how to announce that he wanted to put through a trunk call after dinner, but eventually thought of a way out. There was an extension to the telephone which was in his mother's room upstairs, and he decided to make some excuse after dinner while the family were drinking coffee, and to get upstairs and put through his call. From the dining-room he could not be overheard.

When coffee was served, his sister said to him, "Judy wants you to go up and say goodnight to her." So Bob left the table and went to see her in bed. She was wide awake, and waiting for him, so he put through his call, and while the operator was trying to connect him, he told her some fantastic stories about India.

At last the bell rang, and he heard Sally's voice. She had evidently been waiting for his call.

"Hullo, darling," he said, fatuously, "is that you?"

"Yes, me, darling," was her reply. "How is everything? I miss you terribly; it has quite spoilt coming home having to leave you. Have you told them about me yet?

"Yes, Darling, and mother is writing to ask you down for a week from the 21st, but

before then I'll come up to town and we'll spend the day together. I can't wait a whole week to see you when we've so little time left, sweetheart."

"Oh, Bobby, how lovely! Can you come up on Wednesday? We'll go to a matinée. And, darling, I'll phone you tomorrow about this time, see? Have you written to me yet? You must, you know, everyday. I've written to you but not posted it yet."

"I'll write tonight, Sally darling," he promised.

The operator's voice cut in on them. "Thr'r'r'ee minutes."

"Good-bye, darling," said Bob, "I miss you all the time."

The line went dead, and he returned to Judy's room to tell her more stories. She wanted to show him her treasures, and how well she could read, but his mother came up and said it was time she was asleep, so Bob kissed her good-night and went downstairs.

He told his father he had to scribble a short note, and sat down to write to Sally. When he had finished he gave the letter to the maid Hélène, who went with it to the post.

They then all settled down to talk. His father asked him did he want a drink, and fetched in the whisky and a syphon.

"Help yourself, Bob," he said, and so Bob poured out a generous peg for himself, and added soda. His father took about two fingers of whisky. They chatted about India, his father asking general questions. Mary seemed more interested in the girls he knew, and wanted to know more about Sally, but Bob would not confide.

His whisky being finished, he reached out and poured himself another. His mother and Mary got up to go to bed. He stayed on downstairs talking with his father. Bob helped himself to another drink, and this brought a mild protest.

"Surely, Bob, two of the size you have just had are more than enough."

Bob was surprised. "I'm sorry, Dad," he said. "I didn't really notice I'd had two. Do you mind very much if I have a last one? Nightcap sort of?"

"No, help yourself to all you want," was the answer, but Bob could see his father was worried, and it gave him food for thought.

# CHAPTER XVI

WHEN he woke up next morning the sun was shining into his room, and he found it was quite late. The maid Hélène knocked at the door and brought in his tea. There was a letter from Sally on the tray. He opened it and started to read what she had to say. She sounded a little depressed, and apparently her people did not think it a very good idea her going away again so soon after arriving home.

His father came in and sat on his bed and talked for a while.

"Well, and what does she say?" he asked.

Bob laughed. "Nothing for your eyes," he replied.

"If that's the case, then you had better lock it up somewhere," he was told, "or Mary will have it out and read it. She is the most curious kid I've ever known."

Bob did not take much notice of this as he thought his father must be joking, but he found to his rage, later in the morning, that she had read Sally's letter. In fact, she told him so herself, and seemed quite pleased about it. He could not trust himself to speak to her.

"Oh well," she said, "naturally if you leave your letters lying about they'll be read. What do you expect? There it was on your table so I looked at it.

"What the hell were you doing in my room anyhow?" he asked her. "You have no right to nose around in it."

She told him not to be a fool, and that she would go into his room whenever she liked. He found when he told his father about it, that Mary could do no wrong in the eyes of his parents. His father only laughed indulgently over the whole affair.

"You mustn't mind Mary. She is the baby of the family."

Bob could not see this. He had become so used, while living alone in India, to having his privacy respected, he could not bear the idea of his room being invaded by everyone.

"And anyhow," his father added, "you have nothing to hide from us, so why worry?"

Bob realised that his father could not see the point, and gave up. He saw that they still looked on him as a schoolboy who confided all his little troubles to them. He let the matter drop, as they were so glad to have him back, and meant so kindly, it was not fair to quarrel when he was only home for a month.

He asked where all the chaps he had known before he left home were now, and heard that most of them still lived in Hove, but had jobs which either kept them busy all day or made them take frequent visits to town.

He decided to get in touch with one or two of them and fix up a few parties, but he found when he did eventually meet them again that either they or he had completely changed. He quite understood that on weekdays they could not play golf, or meet him for drinks at the local pub, but even at night, after work, he was always put off with the same old excuse, "Sorry, old boy, must get home, you know. Going to be a long day at the office tomorrow."

Even week-ends were dull and flat. Their idea of a good time was a very proper dance on the Saturday, at which no one drank at all, followed by the deadly dull Sunday. A walk on the front in the morning, and golf in the afternoon. A real "beat-up", as it was understood in India, never entered their minds. He found quite soon that they had absolutely nothing in common, and that he had lost touch completely during his four years away. They did not even seem to speak the same language.

He was very lonely. His father worked a good deal of the day, and his mother and Mary used to spend the morning shopping. Bob, left entirely alone, used to spend his time in the pub. There he met some quite amusing people, but none of them showed any inclination

to accept his invitation to the house. He began to wonder what was the matter. He soon found out.

One day he said to Mary, "Why don't you ever ask some young people round here? Couldn't we do a dance or something in Brighton?"

"There is no one worth asking," was her reply.

And she honestly believed it. Her steadily increasing conceit, encouraged by her mother, had gradually lost her every friend they had ever had. No one ever came to the house now, and she did not care. She was supremely content in the admiration of her own beauty, and pleasure of her own company. She and her mother were absolutely wrapped up in each other, and the constant references made to her fiancé began to get on his nerves.

The lucky young man, John Spencer, though very rich and well-connected was made to believe he was singularly fortunate to secure the prize of Mary. A great favour, in fact, was being conferred on him. She did, in her cold hard way, seem fond of him, but he doted over her.

Bob was not happy. All the complex situation worried him. His sister and mother had become almost strangers to him. He saw they were very fond of each other, and in fact were not at ease or happy apart. This was

probably why Mary kept putting off the date of her marriage continually.

He tried to study her dispassionately, and had to come to the conclusion that she had become almost impossible. It was in a way hardly her fault. She had never been away from home, and her brief stay at boarding school, which had lasted three days before she ran away, had only done her more harm. She had naturally grown to think nothing was too good for her, and that the devoted homage paid her at home was her right. When she looked for this outside, it soon lost her all her friends. Bob was sorry for this, as when she wanted to be, she could be most charming. He hoped unhappily that Sally would not be made miserable.

At last Wednesday arrived and he met her in town. She saw at once things were not well with him, and soon got his troubles out of him.

"I feel most awfully disloyal telling you this," he said, "but they've changed so much at home," and he explained everything to her.

She was so understanding and made him feel much happier. He soon forgot all his worries and they had a very happy day together. She came to the station with him when it was time to leave, and as she kissed him, said:

"Cheer up, dearest. Only two days before Saturday, and I'll be down."

She waved from the platform, a little figure which a curve in the line soon lost to view.

# CHAPTER XVII

SALLY arrived for lunch on Saturday, and Bob saw with relief that she had made a good impression. His parents and Mary were charming to her. He had not worried about his father as he was friendly with anybody, and far too easy-going to be unpleasant to anyone. Bob was very fond of him.

After lunch Mary appropriated Sally, and they both went off down the town. Bob did not go with them, as Sally had said it would be a good chance to get friendly with her. When they had gone, his mother turned to Bob and said :

"She is a very nice girl, dear, and I'm so glad you are fond of each other. By the way, you never told us her father was that General man, Sir Roger Princep."

Bob now realised why Sally had gone down so well. Both his mother and Mary were fearful snobs.

"I thought you knew," he said feebly, and left it at that.

That night Sally, he, Mary and John Spencer were going to dinner and a dance in

Brighton. They all squashed into John's car, and started at about half-past seven because, as he said:

"We want some time to have the odd drink before we eat, and I hate a rush."

Eventually they sat down to dinner, and by the time it was over, the little party was a very happy one, and they were all enjoying themselves, and Bob saw how pleasant Mary could be when she wanted.

He danced mostly with Sally, and John and Mary were quite happy together, so it was a convenient quartette. He asked Sally what she thought of it all.

"I'm enjoying it awfully, darling," she said. "Your people are being very nice to me, especially Mary, but I do see what you mean, and I like your father, he's a dear."

Bob was not very happy at this answer. He knew what she meant.

"Darling," he asked her, "you know money and names don't mean anything to me, don't you?"

"You mustn't be stupid, Bobby dear," she answered. "You make me angry when you say things like that. You know I couldn't love or give myself to you like I have if I thought that. Let's just be happy and not worry."

So for the rest of the evening they danced and thought no more of any obstacles to their happiness, and both were content in each other's nearness. Nothing else mattered.

* * *

After Sally had been staying a few days with them, Bob asked his father if he would, in the event of his wanting to marry, help him out financially at all.

"I suppose that means you want to marry young Sally," he said. "Well, she's a sweet girl and I like her. In fact, your mother and I were talking about it the other night. As you know, business is bad, but I could give you a hundred and fifty a year again. Can you manage on that?"

Bob said he could, but not till he had paid off his debts. His father asked what these were, and was most upset to hear he had been to the moneylenders.

"My dear boy, you should have asked me for help. Whatever made you go to them? How much do you owe? We must see about this at once."

Bob told him, "Only about a hundred and fifty. Maybe a hundred and seventy-five. But you see, Pop, it happened just when you said you couldn't afford my allowance any more, so I didn't want to worry you."

"Well, we'll get that done at once," said the old man. "I hate to think you've had a rotten time financially. I wish you had let me know. Four years ago nearly, was it? Well, you were only a kid then. I suppose it was over some damned woman. But never mind, we'll fix it all up. Have you seen Sally's father?"

"No," said Bob. "I was going to go up with her on Monday when she leaves, and see him then."

"Why not go at once, Bob? Get it over, and if it's all O.K. we can announce it and have a little party."

Bob said he would see what Sally thought of it. He found she was for getting it over and done with, so on the Monday both set out for London and the interview. Sally had 'phoned her mother the night before, and she would prepare the old man for what was coming. She, he learnt from Sally, was on their side, and as her father, to use her own words, was "a mild old bird, and rather a dear," she prophesied no difficulty.

Bob found this to be no exaggeration. The old General was very affable, and talked far more about the old days in India than about Sally. He seemed at last to remember what Bob had come for, and for a while waxed sentimental over Sally, his baby girl, and how it only seemed yesterday she was a squealing mite in his arms, and here she was all ready to get

married. He eventually gave his consent and told Bob he would make her an allowance till he got his captaincy in four years' time.

Sally must have been listening at the door, because she burst into the room at that moment, and flung her arms round the indignant old man's neck, kissing him warmly and thanking him. He tried to ward her off.

"Go away, you little wretch. Don't slobber all over me like that, and what the devil do you mean by eavesdropping? Get out, the pair of you," but he smiled rather sentimentally at them.

As they got out of the door Sally said, "I had to come in, darling. I heard him starting his reminiscing, and I knew, unless someone interrupted, you'd be there all day." She was not in the least ashamed of her listening at the door.

They stayed up in town that night, and the old General sent them out together for the evening to celebrate. Before that, though, Bob rang up his father and told him the engagement was fixed up, and asked him to lend him some money for the ring. It was too late to send it, so his father rang up the London branch of his bank and told them to honour Bob's cheque for £25, so he and Sally spent a happy afternoon choosing the ring. In the end a single sapphire set with small diamonds took her fancy, and though it was more than Bob had

bargained for, he knew his bank would extend the loan a few pounds, so both were happy she had the ring she liked.

Before setting off for the evening, Sally's father drew Bob aside, and slipped a five pound note into his hand.

"The party is on me tonight, my boy," he said, and cut short his thanks with a gruff. "Now, no arguing. Off you go and enjoy yourselves."

It was to them the happiest evening of their lives. Both were sure of it, and told each other gravely it was so. They went to a musical comedy, and then on to the Casino. Sally was in white, and wore her ring which she kept admiring. She was very happy that everything had turned out so well, and especially that Bob no longer owed any money.

They decided to fix the wedding for October, when Sally would come out to India. It would be cooler then, and the winter season would have started. Also his regiment, which was due to move, would be settled in their new station by then, which though a Frontier station, was one to which wives accompanied their husbands.

Sally told him just how she would furnish their bungalow. She knew exactly how it would look, she told him. They did not dance very much; both were quite happy talking and planning, and did not even see half the cabaret,

and were very surprised when they found it time to go home.

Next day they went back to Hove, and had a very busy few days. Every post brought letters of congratulations, in fact, Sally seemed to know almost half London, or so it seemed to Bob.

His parents were happy, and Mary was as nice as she knew how, so the time passed very quickly, too quickly for Bob whose leave was rapidly running to an end. On Saturday Sally went back to Town, and it was arranged Bob should spend the following week with her. That left him six days before sailing, which he would return for with his people.

The days ran by, till all too soon Bob found himself once more at Croydon. He was flying to Marseilles again, and catching the boat there. Sally stood on the field with him. The 'plane was almost ready to leave, her propellers turning slowly.

They did not speak but stood close together. At last the steward called to him to climb aboard. He turned to Sally. She was trying so hard to be brave, but the big tears in her eyes slowly rolled down her cheeks. They clung together for a moment and kissed desperately, each frightened to let the other go. He turned away the 'plane moved forward with a roar from its engines. He could see a little figure standing alone below him. A little whit face was turned upwards, a hand waved.

# CHAPTER XVIII

THE voyage back was very dull as it was an off-season passage, and the boat was less than a quarter full. No one would be visiting India just in time to catch the long hot summer months, and the bulk of the passengers were Army people returning from leave like himself.

He made friends with one of the ship's officers, and spent most of the time with him in his cabin on the boat deck, or in writing long letters to Sally. He did not go ashore at either Port Said or Aden, as he had seen both places so many times, both as a child when travelling to and from England to China where his father was in business, and then later when he was commissioned. The voyage was becoming so familiar that he felt that at a pinch he could almost take the ship out to India himself.

The days slipped by, and at last, on a hot summer afternoon, the dim coastline of India came into view, and in an hour Bob could see details of Bombay Harbour. There was the black and white lighthouse striped like a barber's pole, there was the floating lightship. The Taj stood out clearly. To the left was Malabar Hill, and beyond that the coast swept

away into Juhu Bay. The pilot came alongside. It would only be a little while now. Already the heavy smell of India was being carried across the water to them.

Bob suddenly realised how much he hated the life he was going back to. He felt he could not face the petty squabbles in Mess, the sordid vindictive Station scandal, the general attitude of hopelessness that most people seemed now to have. He wondered how Leslie was.

His thoughts turned to the old Colonel, the Blimp. What a charming old man he was, but how he drove his officers to madness. Incredibly stupid as he was, he had an *idée fixe* that his officers were deceiving him; that they could not be trusted, and even before Bob had gone on leave, the general atmosphere of the Mess was becoming charged with electricity.

It was not that the Blimp was an unpleasant old man, but that he suffered from an overwhelming self-conceit, and at the same time had rather an inferiority complex, if that was possible, through having only had fifteen days' war service. He felt rather that he was thought a shirker, which he certainly was, and that rather made him aggressively efficient.

This meant he interfered with his company commanders to such an extent that he maddened them, muddled everyone, and got nothing done. He also was an expert at

getting leave at the expense of his junior officers. Unfortunately he could not see the trouble he was creating. It never occurred to him he was selfish, or that he destroyed any initiative or ambition among his officers by withholding all responsibility from them.

Bob remembered the words of the Adjutant: "It's no good, old boy. Try to stick things. To fight against him is like struggling against a feather bed. It just envelops you, softly, charmingly, but inevitably. If any of us said anything to him, he'd just be charming, dense, infuriatingly unbelieving."

At the time he had had to agree, but perhaps by now things had changed. In a way one had to be sorry for the Blimp, as he was a very lonely old man, his wife having run away with a subaltern in another regiment some six years before. He had nothing left to interest him, no friends at home, and, as far as anyone could gather, not many in India.

His one passion was collecting butterflies, and every year he took leave and disappeared to some hill station to catch and photograph rare specimens. He never went home to England, and when his period of command ended, he would most likely retire in India, where his lazy muddled old brain would go slacker and slacker till at last he would be very near 'going native'.

Bob shook himself out of his reverie. The ship was nearly alongside now, and so he went down to his cabin to collect his hat and small kit. His agent would see the rest of his baggage through the Customs. In a few minutes the gangway was out, and Bob ashore. There was his bearer smiling and salaaming.

He decided not to go straight back to Ratanagar, as he still had a couple of days' leave, so rang up Thelma Greenway and asked her if she and Peter would dine with him at the Taj. She told him Peter was away in Madras on business, but that she could come along if he did not think it would be too dull. So they fixed up to meet in the usual rendezvous of half Bombay, the American Bar, and made the time seven o'clock.

Bob was glad Thelma could come along that night, for he was in a very gloomy frame of mind, and she always cheered him up. He dressed early, and had been waiting about ten minutes when she arrived.

They were chatting away over cocktails when Thelma asked him how Sally was. Bob was only too glad to talk about her. Somehow even saying her name to someone helped a bit, and Thelma was a sympathetic listener. He suddenly remembered Fatty's words about her that evening so long ago. He decided Fatty was completely mistaken.

She was charming, vivacious, and extremely attractive. Her tall blondeness made

her look doubly so among the many Indians in the room. She was talking to Bob, but he was not listening. He found that he was thinking of her in a way he never had before. He was rather troubled by it, for though he knew his love for Sally was the strongest thing in his being, he realised, with a sense of shame, that he could still find a pretty and attractive woman disturbing.

Suddenly Thelma broke off. She saw he was not taking in what she said. He realised she knew what he was thinking of, his face had unconsciously given him away. She smiled at him, a faint little smile, but so full of understanding, and triumph.

They went on talking. She was even more gay than before, and during dinner she made him laugh a lot. Afterwards they danced till fairly late, and then he saw her home. At her gate she held up her face to be kissed, said to him, "Good-night, my dear," and vanished into the house.

Bob walked back to the hotel and got to his room very late, and though he had to be up early to catch the morning mail train, he sat up and wrote a long letter to Sally. As he wrote he gradually felt at peace again. Writing to her was almost like talking to her. She seemed very near to him as he told her how much he missed her, and how he longed for her first letter at Ratanagar.

He sealed up the letter and stuck on the envelope the blue Air Mail label, then went downstairs again to the hotel post box. When he got back to his room he opened a bottle of whisky, poured out a long drink, and lighting his pipe, sat by the window staring out over the harbour. A few ships lay at anchor, but only showed one or two lights. He felt cut off from the world, alone with just his thoughts.

A woman's voice in the street stirred forgotten memories. Ruby King in Ralpur. He had been so innocent then. How she must have laughed at him! —Sheila, he hoped he had not hurt her—There was Janet— Margaret Stein, he wondered where she was, and hoped she was happy. They all passed through his mind in that silent moment between night and the dawn, like a dream, yet each had meant so much to him once. It made him feel very alone. He realised that he also meant nothing to them now. He turned to Sally.

The thought of her was so comforting. He went to bed. It was nearly light. His lips murmured, "Dear, dear Sally," and he was asleep.

# CHAPTER XIX

He missed the early train, so it was very late when he arrived at Ratanagar. He did not want to go into Mess, as he somehow felt he couldn't yet face everyone. Those stupid enquiries, "Did you have a good leave?" meant so well and kindly, and yet so infuriating.

The bearer went over to get him some supper in his room, and while he was away Bob looked around his quarters. His dog followed him wherever he went. Poor old thing, it had missed him so much, it was not going to let him out of its sight.

It seemed very strange being back. There was his room that he had furnished himself, the carpets and small rugs he had bought from travelling vendors, his pictures, and his dog, the one person in all the world to whom he knew he was everything.

Suddenly he realised so very clearly that in his thoughts this was his home. It was here he lived and worked. Here he had had his greatest disappointments, and some of his happiest moments, and yet there were times, countless times, when he had felt desperately lonely. It was then that he wanted so much

to come back to his bungalow after a long day, and find it not empty like it always had been, but with someone waiting for him. Someone to whom he meant something. Someone who asked him was he tired, and to whom his reply mattered. He realised he wanted to marry, and perhaps that was why he was so happy he had found such a dear thing as Sally. Bob was very much of a sentimentalist in some ways.

Next morning it felt very strange to him to get into uniform again, and his Wolseley helmet appeared to be smothering him. He got on his bicycle and, followed by Baldur, his grey Alsatian, went down to the lines. In his pocket was the letter that he had found waiting for him from Sally, and though he had read it a dozen times, he hoped, if there was no parade on, to read it again.

The Adjutant, Tom Bowley, was wandering round the parade ground, slapping his boots with his cane, watching the men doing physical training. He looked very bored. When he saw Bob, he waved and called out to him:

"Come over here and let's hear all your low sexual adventures on the boat," he said.

Bob laughed, and joined him. There was nothing much going on in the way of training, so both wandered round for half an hour before breakfast, talking together.

Bob asked him, "How's the Blimp?"

Tom Bowley groaned aloud. "Oh, my God, he's awful. At the rate he's going he'll drive someone mad. It is infinitely worse than before you went. I think his brain is going. He gets down to office about noon, and after keeping us all waiting till then, decides nothing. He's frightened to, as he only has a year to go, and is windy of making a mistake. Also, you know, no one has had leave besides you. You were damned lucky to get away while you did."

"But," said Bob, "that's bloody silly. We've got two officers over our minimum strength now. Why aren't they away?"

"Why?" echoed Tom. "I'll tell you bloody why. You remember the old sod got ten months' furlough last year? Well, as you know, the two extra months were a special case for him to settle his kids in school. Now he thinks he may not get his leave this year, but won't let anyone else go in case, as soon as they are off, he might hear he can go, and then find, through sanctioning their leave, he can't go himself till September."

Bob asked about some of the other officers, and said: "How is the disgruntled Major?"

"Who do you mean? Old Clarke?"

"Yes."

"Oh well, Mrs. C. has come out, you know. He put his foot down at last, and said if she

didn't, he would cut off her allowance. So here she is plus the two kids. Old C. is very happy, as the kids mean a hell of a lot to him. She is hopeless, though. Already she is fooling around with a chap in the 21st Rifles. They play squash every day in one of those courts without a balcony. If you go there you never hear a sound, but if you try the door to see if the court's empty, immediately a ball starts getting hit around. The other day she forgot to brush herself down before coming out, and Fatty and I were outside waiting to play. Damned red in the face, and that grey dust stuff they have on the floor of the court all over her back and in her hair. She really is a first class whore. He goes next week, but a new course starts in July, and she'll have one of the chaps on that soon enough."

They walked off to their cycles and went back to the Mess for breakfast. Fatty and Leslie were both already at the table. Bob was glad to meet them again, and did not mind their good-natured ragging of him about what he did or did not do on leave.

"By the way," said Fatty, who was doing Mess Secretary. "The band is playing retreat this evening, and as it's quite a big show with the whole Station invited, we all are to turn up. The Blimp says lounge suits or dinner jackets for us. Will you help get everything ready? Drinks, tables, and everything?"

Bob said he would, and he and Fatty strolled over to the bungalow talking. When they reached Bob's room, Fatty saw all the photos of Sally, and asked how things were with him and her. The news of the engagement had not yet arrived in India, as the papers took three weeks to get out, but the next mail would have the announcement.

Fatty was very surprised, but he was fond of both Bob and Sally, so congratulated him warmly, and asked if the Colonel knew yet.

"No, he doesn't as a matter of fact," said Bob, "but I'll tell him some time this week. He won't mind, especially as with our combined allowances we can afford it, and that's his only grouse about subalterns marrying."

Fatty agreed, and they went down to their company offices to do the morning's work of signing papers, hearing complaints, and dealing with a dozen little cases of law-breaking. It was astonishing how soon the old routine and surroundings made leave seem a dream of the past. Almost as if it had never happened at all. It would only be a matter of a few days before he settled down into the old rut, and plodded through the days, contented enough in his own way.

It was a pity, though, that the 'old man' was upsetting his officers so much. If only he could be made to realise what was happening, but most likely he would find it impossible to

believe, for he thought his Mess was happy, and could not see that it was not so. His own interests blinded him to all others, and yet when he realised the necessity for it, he was the most kindly and pleasant old man.

* * *

After tea Bob helped Fatty with the arrangements for 'retreat'. Little tables were put out on the Mess lawn, and chairs scattered round and about. The servants had been dressed in their best uniforms, and in the bright evening sun, the scarlet and gold of the bandsmen looked very smart. Soon a few cars appeared, and the first guests arrived.

It was the same old set. It did not make any difference what the entertainment was, one met the same people, wearing the same clothes, and with them talked the same scandal and shop. Bob noticed that the hot weather was beginning to tell on some of the women present. Their faces were looking thin and lifeless, yet they did their best to look smart, and with the two or three bazaar shops which were the only places to buy clothes in Ratanagar, it was more than creditable that they did not look ten years out of date.

The band had started playing and was marching up and down the roadway which passed the Mess lawn. Servants were busy carrying round drinks, for whenever there was a free show on in the Station, the hardest boozers

in the district flocked to attend. It was strange to see people who were known to be almost teetotal accepting glass after glass, not as they wanted it but because it was free, and they were not going to miss anything.

Some of the officers' wives were the worst offenders for, starting on whiskies, they gradually let their imagination run riot, and before long were asking for cherry brandy, orange and lemon gin, and even liqueurs. Bob saw that there were going to be some sore heads next day, and not a few casualties either before the evening was out.

The band finished their programme and played the National Anthem. It was now getting dark, but no one showed any signs of leaving, though it was nearly eight o'clock and most people dined between half-past and nine o'clock.

Fatty was getting worried. He went inside the Mess, and asked the clerk how the drinks were lasting out. He found that already seventeen bottles of whisky had gone, and only five were left. At the rate the party was warming up, these would be finished in half an hour. He sent an orderly down to the bazaar for another dozen bottles. They should be sufficient, he thought. The gin was lasting well, but the priceless Napoleon brandy, of which the Mess only had three bottles, was finished. The clerk told him that "some Sahibs from Poona" had drunk it all.

Fatty was very angry. The total number of guests could not have been more than seventy-five, including the dozen or so from outside Stations, and yet in less than two hours they had drunk more than they usually did in two weeks. Some of the women were as hard drinkers as any of the men, and seemed in the end to hold it better.

Bob strolled in to see him. Fatty told him the brandy was finished, and he answered, "Yes, I know. There are about half a dozen chaps from Poona, and a couple of blokes off the course, soaking it down with soda as if it was lemonade." He then went on to say, "Little Mrs. Dodd, the doctor's wife, has had to be taken home. She was sick in the drive, and that bloody Smith woman—you know, the veterinary Colonel's wife—has got on to her favourite subject. Says that now the Brigadier's wife is in England, she is the senior wife in Ratanagar. Actually she is tight, but is looking for trouble. This 'senior wife' business will start it too, because the others hate her, and have had enough to make them see red."

Fatty laughed. "Yes, it's damned funny how the wives are always screaming about who is senior to who, whilst their husbands don't give a damn, except on parade, and certainly not at a party." He looked at Bob and then added, "Have you ever thought of Sally in this bunch? She'll be a subaltern's wife."

Bob had thought of it often, and answered after a few seconds. "Yes, I know all that, but she says she doesn't mind, and after all, I'll be a captain three years after we're married—and also, Fatty, you must admit that all of them don't push their husbands' ranks down your throat, do they?"

Fatty pondered deeply. He was by now a bit tight himself. "About three-quarters of them do," he announced, and then got up. "Come on, Bob, we'd better join the crowd again and be 'social successes'. Not that they care if we're there or not so long as the glasses are full."

Bob laughed and protested, "Oh, it's not as bad as all that, old boy," but Fatty had staggered out, so he followed him outside.

The conversation being carried on by the different groups of guests was getting like that at the "Mad Hatter's Tea Party". No one bothered to listen to anyone else, and just talked quite happily at the top of his or her voice. Bob was accosted by a Mrs. Johnson, the missionary's wife. She looked very woebegone.

"Oh dear," she said, "could I go and lie down in your room, Bob? I feel so sick."

Poor thing, she had only had a couple of small drinks, but not being used to it had made her ill. His bungalow was near, so he took her

there, got some ice to put on her forehead, and left her to recover before she faced her husband.

At last the guests started thinning out, and by half-past nine the last drunk had been put into a car and driven home. The hosts surveyed the wreckage. Glasses were everywhere, and a large percentage were still half full, the owners having taken another drink before emptying their previous glasses.

The Blimp was very pleased, and said to his officers: "Well, gentlemen, I think it was a highly successful retreat. We must do this more often."

He was very drunk, and went off to his car and drove away. They watched him go in silence. Then one of the senior Captains called Woods, married and with two children, spoke:

"I don't know what you chaps think of it. I admit it was a damned amusing evening, and it does the regiment good to have the occasional 'At home', but this is going to set us back at least six hundred chips, and only seven members of the Mess to pay it. I still say that what we decided at the last Mess meeting was best. Have these shows once every quarter, but limit the guests. Send out invitations to each person, and not do what we did for today, just stick an 'invite' up in the Club asking the whole bloody Station to come."

They all agreed, and Tom Bowley broke in to ask, "And anyhow, who the hell asked those

outside s——ts to come along? Did they just barge in?"

No one knew, and they went in to supper. It had been a very good entertainment, but the thought of their share of the monthly cost of "Mess guests" was rather worrying to the subalterns.

After eating, they sat out on the lawn for a few minutes. The servants had cleared away the débris. A groan came from the bushes at the bottom of the garden. The last 'body' had been overlooked. It was bundled into a hand-cart and wheeled home.

# CHAPTER XX

In July, Leslie got away on leave and, together with Anne, sailed for home by the P. & O. mail boat. They hoped to get married in England if Leslie could land some sort of job. If he succeeded in doing so, he intended resigning his commission and letting his creditors, to use his own words, "sing for their money", for once he was out of India they would be unable to lay hands on him. There was every chance of him finding work at home, for he was going on long leave, so would have a clear six months to look around.

Bob and Fatty were now left alone, and so were thrown together very much more than before. The life of the Station went on as before, and one day was very like another, so much so that the weeks were only marked off by the arrival of mail day. Bob would then get his long-looked-forward-to weekly letter from Sally which he read when alone in his bungalow.

She was not a good letter writer, and found it very difficult to put her thoughts into words, as Bob well knew, having seen her laborious efforts to write. But somehow the few pages he got each week were so essentially "Sally" that

they brought her very near to him. As he read them he could see her frowning and biting the end of her pen in her desperate efforts to tell him all she wanted to. He, on the other hand was a facile letter writer, and spent hours covering page after page with his neat script, telling her of every little thing that happened, and how much he missed her, and planning ahead for him and her.

He loved these moments alone in his room, and used to write always after Mess when everywhere was quiet and, save for the distant throbbing of a drum, the world was asleep, and the air thick with the heavy scent of tropical flowers.

The hot weather should have been over by now, but the monsoon showed no sign of breaking. Water was running short, and supplies were cut off during certain hours of the day. Ratanagar lay on a plateau with hills to the south and the great drop of the Western Ghats down to the coastal plain on the West and North-West. Therefore, when the rains came inland from the sea coast, they hit the mountains, rose above them, and in passing over Ratanagar never came down low enough or long enough really to do much good. In a good year the fall was about forty inches, yet only seventy miles away was Mahableshwar in the hills which got over two hundred and fifty inches in the two months of the monsoon.

As the shortage grew more acute, cattle began dying, and the crops failed. It was then that cholera broke out among the villages for, as the wells dried up, the natives drew water from old wells, long since unused, and containing stagnant water. In cantonments the shortage was not so much felt, but people were not allowed to water their gardens, and in consequence the flowers died, and there was much indignation. This was really the greatest inconvenience to which the white population was put. Nearby in the villages men, women and children died, in spite of the frantic efforts of the missions to relieve their suffering. In the garrison church the chaplain held an extra service one Sunday and prayed for rain. He then proceeded to the Club for his evening game of tennis.

In August the "Week" was held. From the eighteenth to the twenty-seventh there were daily 'At Homes' given by the British regiment, the Indian regiment, the Army School of Instruction, the Veterinary Staff, and the civilians. There was also a Polo Tournament lasting three days, and a mounted gymkhana. At each 'At Home' the people one had met the day previously met again, and tried to pretend it was all a great novelty and "such fun."

Two teams had entered for the Polo tournament from Poona, and one from Bombay. The British regiment produced one, and a

scratch team was raised called the Ratanagar Roughriders.

The polo was not of a high standard, for the tournament was not sufficiently well-known to attract good players. However, there was great energy displayed, and much furious riding. Two horsemen would sweep down upon the ball and lash out at it. A cloud of Ratanagar dust would arise, and through it would gallop two more couples of players. A breath of wind dispersing the cloud showed the ball lying comfortably in its bed of withered grass. Nothing daunted, the players would rush fiercely down on it again, perhaps to repeat the same performance, or propel it a few yards along the brick-hard ground.

At the tea interval one sat at a small table eating cakes from "Comaglia's", the Italian restaurant which had the catering for Ratanagar Week. One had eaten the same cakes the day before, and the day before that, and knew tomorrow at the Civilians 'At Home' the same would appear again.

When the Week ended, all that remained was sent invariably to the Missions who, together with Signor Comaglia, were the people who benefited most from the Week. However, it was a change from the usual routine, and a few new faces appeared at the functions from other Stations, and on the whole the Ratanagar Week was looked forward to, and the nightly dances at the club very well attended.

Bob was at one of these dances with Fatty in a Mrs. Jacobs' party, towards the end of the Week's festivities. Vi Jacobs was a queer woman, aged about thirty or thirty-two, and married to a Captain in the Engineers. She liked having a large circle of young men round her, and used to say the most outrageous things in front of them, to make them think what a good sport she was. Her husband was a nice chap, and so used to her that he never bothered what she did or said. He was all for a quiet life, and let her go her own way.

She was an overwhelming sort of person who, on first acquaintance, would offer to "put you up for as long as you like", or, if an impecunious subaltern, try to lend him money. People usually found her a bit too much for them, but a few who knew her well, as did Bob and Fatty, realised she meant well and had far too kind a heart, for she was often grossly imposed upon.

She had told them long before that she and her husband no longer slept together, and she made no secret of the fact that she took a long succession of lovers. The odd part of her was that she used to revile Mrs. Clarke for the same thing, and her remarks about the Padre's wife were cruel in the extreme.

The latter was a dried up little woman in whose life had never been any romance, for her husband was an unctuous hypocrite who, in his

quiet 'godly' manner, was an out-and-out bully. Her parties were the subject of many cruel jokes in the Station, for she used to try frantically to get a young set round for a dance, and weeks before the date, would send out invitations to young officers to dine at her house and then go on to the dance. They were never accepted.

It was not that she was disliked, for she was not unattractive in her washed-out, mousy way, for her deadly life had prematurely aged her, but that the Padre was loathed throughout the district. So she was a lonely little soul, and most people felt sorry for her.

Not so Vi Jacobs, for when Bob saw the Padre and his wife sitting alone as usual, and said: "Look, Vi, do you mind if Patty and I go and join them for a few minutes? She looks damned bored."

Vi retorted: "Do no such thing. She's a stupid little fool, always trying to make up parties. Why doesn't she realise she's finished—she ought to."

Bob, surprised at the venom in her voice, asked, "What do you mean?"

"Good God!" said Vi. "Surely you know that whenever he is away on tour, she has troops into the house."

Bob looked at her and laughed inwardly. Here was the pot calling the kettle black with a

vengeance. Even then Vi was mistress to a Major Dreycup in his own battalion. Only the previous week-end had Vi gone to Bombay alone to shop, and he had followed. Bob looked at her and said:

"Well, she's not any worse than lots of others, Vi. Just because a troop goes to her, does that make her any worse than if it were a Field Marshal?"

"Don't be such a fool," was the angry retort. "Can't you see how bad that is for discipline?"

He laughed out loud. Evidently rank counted even in what some of them called "love".

After the dance ended, he took Vi back to their circle, and with Fatty went to the bar, where he repeated Vi's remark. He was very tickled by it, and asked.

"Has the silly bitch got no sense of humour at all?"

It was quite evident she had not, for she was extremely angry when she saw them go over to the other table, and saw Fatty ask for a dance while Bob sat and talked to the Padre. They decided it was safer, with Vi in the temper she was, not to go back to her party at all, so stayed on where they were.

Eventually the Padre decided they must go home, and so told his wife to get her cloak.

She tried to stay on, but he overruled her protests. As they left she turned to Bob and said.

"I'm giving a little party next Saturday. I thought dinner and then the pictures afterwards. I'd be so glad if you would both come."

They were caught. Neither could think of any excuse, so stammered out how delightful it sounded, and they would love to come. They then repaired in gloomy silence to the bar. Once there, Fatty, red with indignation, turned on Bob.

"Now look what you've done, you bloody ape! If it hadn't been for your damned fool idea of joining them, we wouldn't be in for this."

Bob replied weakly that he had felt so sorry for her sitting all alone the whole evening with that husband of hers. This merely added to Fatty's rage.

"Sorry for her! Sorry for her! Look what your idiotic 'sorrying' has done. Just stop being sorry for people or we'll get into a worse fix than this one day."

Bob had to laugh. Fatty really was a loyal old ass, he thought to himself. He stuck to Bob whatever happened, and it would never occur to him to refuse an invitation Bob accepted on his behalf, and so leave him in the lurch.

They drank deeply, turning over in their minds how they could avoid the threatened 'party'.

* * *

At last the monsoon broke, nearly two months later than usual. Overnight the grass sprang up, and the brown parched earth was transformed into a green carpet. The temperature fell at once, and with it frayed nerves and tempers disappeared. The Station seemed to take on a new lease of life. Unfortunately the rains had come too late to save the crops, and the native farmers were facing a very lean year ahead of them.

The racing season had started in Poona, and many people from outlying Stations used to drive there for an afternoon's sport. Unfortunately Ratanagar was too far to get in from and back in the same day, so it meant taking a weak-end's leave and returning on the Sunday. This was not often granted, as the Colonel was very set against gambling, and never gave permission to go more than once in a month. However, they usually managed to get round him in the end, so had quite a few amusing breaks from the dullness of Ratanagar.

The race-course never failed to fascinate Bob, for the Indian being a confirmed gambler, however poor, always managed to attend en masse, and presented a most intriguing spectacle. He once asked a well-known Indian business man in the Member's enclosure how it was that the great majority of the spectators in the cheap enclosure, though obviously of the poorest class and probably earning ten rupees a

month, could still afford the two rupees entrance fee, and the minimum tote ticket of one rupee.

"They are quite mad," replied his friend, "and will go to any lengths to raise the money to satisfy their passion for it, for the Indian is the greatest gambler in the world. Not only in racing either, for they will bet on anything. Nothing is too fantastic for a gamble or small flutter. Two men might be sitting at the side of the road near a turning. They hear a car hooting, coming towards the corner, one will say to the other, 'I bet you a Sahib is driving that car,' and the other will take him on. Perhaps only one pie, less than a farthing, will change hands, but it is enough. Sometimes they find the car approaching too slowly, so bet as to whether it is dark or light, open or closed, in addition to their first bet."

Bob was very interested, and asked, "Is that why so many turn up even to watch an inter-company or platoon hockey match, to bet on the result?"

"Partly," was the answer, "but not on the result. That is too slow for them, and would involve nearly an hour of waiting before they knew the result. They will bet on movements during the game, perhaps as to whether the outside left will reach the ball his centre forward has just passed to him, or will it go out of play first."

Bob turned to watch the racing with a new interest. He now understood the meaning of the tense looks of the poorer backers. The running of their fancy might mean a month of near starvation for them, for the moneylenders, who financed most of them, charged over seventy-five per cent and were ever present, even in the enclosure were their spies watching their clients, and always on hand to relieve them of their wretched winnings.

The Indian was a queer mixture, thought Bob. They had often discussed them in the Mess, and it was a burning question among Indian Army Units, each regiment of whom was in the process of having one battalion "Indianised", or officered by educated Indians. Everyone agreed the Indian peasant, from whom the Army was recruited, was a gentleman in the true sense of the word. He was loyal, honest, and brave, and looked on his officer as a father. When they were promoted to the old type of Indian officer—that is, a Jemadar or Subadar holding a Viceroy's commission as against a British officer's King's commission—they were efficient and trusted by the sepoys who knew that they too were once sepoys, and through sheer merit had found favour in the Sahibs' eyes, and so risen to the rank of Indian officer.

However, directly a little education was given to the Indian, he became a most unpleasant character. Always looking for slights,

and because of a strong inferiority complex, violently anti-British and disloyal. Unfortunately, there were a number of these latter in the new Indianised battalions. They were called British officers, for they held a 'King's Commission' as against the old type of Jemadar and Subadar, and were generally disliked and mistrusted by the sepoys they commanded.

In Bob's regiment their fourth battalion was being thus changed. It had once been a happy battalion, with a fine record of war service, both in India and abroad. It was now almost in a state of chaos, and definitely a most unhappy battalion, of whom it was generally said, that in case of war, all responsibility in command would have to be taken from the British Indian officers, as the men would never follow them. Unfortunately, the experiment of Indianisation had to go on, or the new Congress Party would accuse the British of not giving it a fair trial. Thus it had to continue until it was tested in war, and shown to be a failure.

# CHAPTER XXI

In September Bob had to go on another Course, the Physical Training Course at Saugor. He was naturally lazy as far as exercise of that sort went, and though fond of games, the thought of the dull brainless exertion of this Course appalled him. His letters to Sally complained bitterly about it. He pointed out to her the absurdity of making grown men dress in totally inadequate vests and shorts, and solemnly leap in the air and fling themselves about like madmen. To his disgust she thought it extremely humorous, and so he got no sympathy from her.

So one September afternoon he stood on Ratanagar Station platform for the last time, with his dog and Leslie's, which he was looking after while he was on leave, and said good-bye to the few people who had come to see him off. The regiment was moving to the Frontier in October, so he would join it there when his Course ended.

Ratanagar was looking its best when he left. The rains had done their work, and the whole country-side was covered in green grass. Away in the distance were the purple hills, and

at their foot lay the great expanse of blue water of the reservoir, once again full. He suddenly realised he was sorry in a way to be leaving. Here he had lived for three years. He had furnished his rooms, built with Patty a garden in which they had both taken a great pride, and made good friends. It was, after all, the place he knew best of all as "home".

He turned away. It was no use getting gloomy and sentimental over moving. He would have to do it many more times before his service in India ended. The whistle blew, he called out good-bye again, and got into his carriage. The dogs barked excitedly and ran from side to side looking out of the windows.

* * *

The journey was tedious, as the landscape was completely flat, and ran on for hundreds of miles without any change. The dogs were a nuisance, and hated the narrow confines of the small carriage. Their food arrangements caused a lot of trouble also, and Bob was very glad when at last, after twenty-four hours of travelling, he arrived at Saugor.

He had arranged to live at the Club, as the officers on the Course numbered only thirteen and there was no permanent Mess for them. When he arrived it was quite early in the morning, but the secretary's clerk had started to work, and assured Bob that all his reservations were in order, and that he had been allot-

ted a bedroom, sitting-room and bath, and talking rapidly in his sing-song 'chi-chi' accent, led Bob round to the back of the building.

There on the lawn was pitched a large tent. In it was a camp bed, easy chair, dressing table, commode, and tin hip-bath. Bob was furious, the 'babu' apologetic.

"The Secretary Sahib is sick, Sahib," he explained, "and there has been little mistake in your booking. Your room is occupied till next week. Please to use this till then."

There was nothing else to do except take what accommodation was offered. It was no good even getting angry. Bob realised that once more he was up against the Indian mentality which would not admit, as in this case, that a room was not available just yet, but promised anything—everything—and then sat back and hoped that, when the time came to make good these promises, something would turn up to save disaster. He gave in with as good a grace as he could. After all, a week was not so long as it might have been.

After breakfast, which he had early and so found the Club dining-room empty, Bob went down to the Physical Training School to report his arrival. There he was issued with shorts, a couple of very hairy vests, and stockings. Having learned that these had been worn consistently by officers on other Courses, he did not

fancy the idea of wearing them himself, so got a tailor up from the bazaar to copy all the kit. He found that this was the general practice, as not many people liked sharing kit with countless others who had preceded them. Also as the parades entailed violent exercise and much sweating, it was not an attractive idea, even when realising the kit had been washed beforehand.

On going back to the Club he met the rest of the "students", most of them fed up, as this was about the most unpopular Course in the Army. There were, however, some amusing men on it, so Bob decided it might almost be as good fun as the two months at Lalchandri. The only drawback was that living in the Club meant added expense, and being right on top of the bar, so to speak, together with the fact that one felt amazingly fit after a week of training, led to extremely heavy drinking and parties which continued far into the night. Of course for the first half-hour of parade next morning they felt like death, but the hard work soon got rid of any previous night's hang-over.

Actually so long as they could see the funny side of some of the work, such as the tug-of-war training, the games of basket-ball (which till then they had all thought was a game played by little girls), and some of the other exercises which were meant to be taken deadly seriously, it was quite good fun, and most of the officers enjoyed the Course.

In November was the half-term long week-end break, and most of the students decided to have a fling in Paralabad, the nearest big city. There were good hotels, modern cinemas, clubs, and many other of the delights of modern civilisation. An ideal place to work off their surplus energy, and a pleasant break from the monotony of Saugor.

On the Friday evening therefore Bob and two other officers, Lionel Frier and John Stokes, stepped out of the car they had hired to drive over from Saugor, and walked up to the reception desk of the Imperial Hotel. As it was the touring season in India, the big entrance hall of the hotel was very full, and the nasal voices of many Americans could be heard above the general hum of conversation, discussing the sights they had seen that day. Paralabad was a favourite touring centre, as it was a holy centre of the Hindus, and the burning ghats and countless temples were a great attraction for visitors.

Bob, Lionel and John cast a rapid and expert eye over the throng. There were not a few promising-looking 'frippets' as John called them, but with only five days in hand, they would have to work quickly.

Lionel said, "The Yanks are the best. They'll swallow anything, especially if you can put across the Bengal Lancer line."

John did not agree, and said, "No, the best line is that you're down from the back of

beyond, and haven't seen a woman for years. Then gaze hungrily at them. They lap it up," and so saying, pulled his handkerchief out of his overcoat pocket, and with it his service revolver, which they carried as protection against 'dacoits', as they had travelled through many hours of darkness along the frequently-raided Grand Trunk road. As it crashed down on the counter, the little Indian reception clerk gave a scream and dived under the desk flap. In the dead silence that followed, and amid the curious stares of the occupants of the lounge, the three made their way, very self-consciously and feeling extremely foolish, to their rooms.

After a quick bath and change into dinner jackets, they went down to the entrance lounge to drink and watch the visitors. By dinner time all three had got rid of far too much alcohol than was good for them, and the maitre d'hotel, or head waiter in charge of the lounge, was eyeing them doubtfully. At any moment he might signal the barman to stop serving them, and then there would probably have been some hot words flying around. Luckily they felt hungry after their long drive, and decided to go in and eat, and the large dinner, though taken with more whisky, sobered them up.

They had liqueurs in the lounge again, and discussed plans for the evening. There was a dance on at the Splendide nearby, and the commissionaire assured them that the cabaret was very good. A company from Europe was

touring, he said. They decided to have a look at it, as it should be good, and not like the cabarets put on in the small up-country stations they had been used to.

They ordered a taxi, and gave the driver instructions to take them to the Splendide. There they bought entrance tickets and walked into the ball-room. It was air-conditioned, and felt very cold after the warm night air outside. The band was playing, and the floor was very crowded. The head waiter led them to a table for six, evidently thinking they could not be alone. However, as they hoped not to be for long, they did not correct him. They sat down, ordered drinks, and looked around.

There were a lot of attractive women sitting around, and it was easy to pick out the foreigners from the way they spoke to the Indian waiters, and from the way they found such a lot to laugh at and to admire in their surroundings. The saris of some of the Indian ladies dancing were much admired. One large party of about a dozen, obviously off some 'World Tour' liner, were sitting nearby, and Lionel said:

"I'm going to ask one of the girls to dance. Those big parties touring around together are generally fairly easy-going, so I may not get the bird."

He got up and walked across to the table, and asked a pretty little brunette to dance.

She gave him a smile, and said she would love to. Bob and John watched to see how he got on. Both he and the girl seemed to be enjoying themselves, and clapped loudly for an encore when the dance ended. Lionel brought her back to the table, and introduced her to Bob and John Stokes. She suggested they should all join up, and so, only too glad to agree, all three went over to the American's table.

Introductions followed all round. There were three young men, a couple more girls, and a middle-aged man and woman in the party. Evidently the chaperons. All were from the "Belgenland" at present on a world tour. The ship stayed a week in Bombay, and so all the passengers had disembarked and were "doing India."

Mamie Johnson, as their first acquaintance was called, pointed out a great many more passengers from the boat, and told them about three hundred were in Paralabad. Most would be moving on to Agra to see the Taj Mahal, then Benares, before travelling down by rail to Colombo where they rejoined the "Belgenland".

They were a friendly crowd, and it was surprising how much of that 'Bengal Lancer' type they expected to hear. Bob and Lionel did not spin any tales, as they felt it rather a dirty trick after all the friendliness shown them. John, however, must have been telling his tale, for Bob overheard him say to a girl sitting next to him.

"Yes. Not for a whole year. Just out in the blue all by myself," and he gazed at her, as he thought, hungrily. Actually he looked so like a drunkenly solemn old owl that Bob laughed out loud. John was very angry, but the girl laughed too, and seemed to find him amusing.

Their new friends were staying over for another three days, so they all saw the sights of Paralabad together. Bob had found Mamie very attractive and pleasant, and they spent a lot of time together. Lionel, who had first met her, did not mind, as he was more attracted by another member of the party.

Mamie told Bob, the day before she was leaving, that she wanted to see the Taj by moonlight, but not with the whole crowd she was with. Bob agreed. He said:

"I've heard it is marvellous, but of course if you go with a hundred other people, it spoils the effect. Why don't you go alone a day before?"

She couldn't believe him when he told her he had never seen it himself. She thought he was joking till he assured her it was true.

"My!" she exclaimed, "you Britishers are amazing. Five years in India, twice passed through Agra and never seen the Taj! We Americans can never understand you."

Suddenly she clapped her hands together, and turned to Bob.

"I know what we'll do. We'll take the agent's car, and drive over this afternoon. It is full moon tomorrow, but will be just as good tonight. Then we can have it to ourselves, and be back again tomorrow morning. I'll be doing a good deed too in making you see it."

Bob hesitated, and was lost. Mamie went off to interview the agent who was acting as guide to the party, and wheedled him into lending his car. He wanted them to take his driver with them, but Mamie soon squashed that suggestion. She announced that:

"Lootenant Kempley will drive. He's a British officer and knows the way, and will take care of me —perhaps," she added with a twinkle in her eyes.

They left the Imperial soon after tea, and were speeding along the excellent metalled road leading to Agra. The car was a big saloon model, and they did the journey comfortably in three and a half hours. The moon would not be up properly before about eleven o'clock, so they drove to the Cecil Hotel and had dinner there.

The long drive had been the first time Mamie and Bob had been alone together, and though they had flirted mildly before this, it had always been amongst the jolly crowd of other Americans, and had all been in fun. Somehow the secret jaunt to the Taj that they were planning, together with the long journey

together, had made them conscious of a new feeling of intimacy, and both felt it strongly during dinner, and were rather silent.

Bob said to her, "Let's not go to see it till about two or three in the morning. Then we'll be quite alone. Most of the other people will have gone by then."

Mamie agreed, and after dinner they sat on the verandah for a while, then drove out to the banks of the Jumna. There they sat by the water's edge and watched the moon rise. It was very quiet, and very beautiful. She suddenly spoke to him, and he did not quite hear her. She repeated it.

"It seems so queer, all this. I did not know you existed till three days ago, and here I am from the other end of the world, sitting close to you by an Indian river. Then tomorrow we just pass out of each other's lives again."

They suddenly felt inexpressibly lonely, and drew close together to reassure each other. The moonlight shone in her great dark eyes. She looked unreal, desirable, lovely. With a sigh of contempt she lay back in his arms. The river flowed by, silent, ageless. It had seen so many poor little creatures, lonely and frightened, on its banks, trying to find solace and peace in each other.

He spoke to her. "We had better go on, darling."

They saw the Taj together. The symbol of an Emperor's grief—beautiful, unreal, surrounded by the silence and mystery of an Indian night. She knew, as did he, that tonight was only a dream. They would part so soon into their own different worlds, and this night would be just a fleeting, rather lovely, memory, spoilt if they met again.

# CHAPTER XXII

BECAUSE of Bob being sent on the Course, it meant that Sally's arrival in India had had to be postponed from October to December, and so Bob was very glad when it ended at last, though it had been good fun.

In the meantime his regiment had moved to Nurkhet on the Frontier, and it was there that he wrote for permission to go and fetch Sally from Karachi and bring her up to Nurkhet. He got ten days' casual leave given him, and so one Saturday morning in mid-December stood eagerly on the docks waiting for the coastal steamer, which was bringing Sally on from Bombay to Karachi, to arrive. It was due to tie up at eight in the morning, but was in sight two hours earlier. Bob could not see why it took so long to come alongside.

At last it got near enough for him to see the passengers on deck, and he soon picked out Sally and waved to her, and very soon afterwards they were kissing each other at the top of the gangway. He couldn't believe that at last Sally had really come, and kept stopping his talking and looking at her as if to see if she was still there. It was wonderful being together again.

Bob's agents were looking after all the baggage arrangements and the railway bookings. All they had to do was to arrive at the station in time to catch the train. Sally's friends, with whom she had been staying at Lalchandri the year before, the Pemhertons, had come down to Karachi to meet her, and Betty Pemberton, who had been to school with her and was going to be bridesmaid, was travelling up to Nurkhet in Sally's compartment. Bob had one to himself.

They were being married four days after reaching Nurkhet, so had not much time for making any arrangements for the wedding themselves. It was Mrs. Clarke who saw to all that, and also arranged a bungalow and hired furniture for them. She really had been an angel about it all, and when Bob thought of how he had discussed and laughed over her "affaires", he felt very guilty. She was also putting up Sally and Betty till after the wedding, and in fact helping them in every way.

The journey was quite pleasant as the weather was cool, and having Sally to travel with made all the difference, and the three days in the train were soon over. The last part of the journey was the worst, as it had to be made by narrow-gauge railway, which was very slow and uncomfortable. They finally reached Nurkhet about seven in the evening, and Mrs. Clarke was on the platform waiting to meet them.

She carried off the two girls, who she said must be tired, and told Bob that directly he had got all the luggage away, to come along to the bungalow, as she expected him to dinner. So he hurried along to his quarters and changed as quickly as possible, and about forty minutes later was sitting having a drink with Major Clarke. Sally and Betty were still talking in Mrs. Clarke's room, listening to all the latter was telling them about the wedding arrangements.

During dinner Mrs. Clarke suggested that Sally next morning would like to see the bungalow they were going to have, and also see if she needed any more furniture. Sally had brought out all necessary linen, curtains, cutlery and such, but, as was the custom all over India, the furniture would be hired monthly. This saved constant packing and expense as far as Army families went, for the average length of stay in any one Station seldom exceeded three years, and on the Frontier like Nurkhet only two.

Mrs. Clarke, deciding the girls needed an early night, packed Bob off home quite early, telling him Sally would see him next morning.

Bob had to work all morning, and was not free till lunch time. When he got back to his room he found Sally there, who was very interested in his belongings and his dog. She had not seen his quarters before, and had some

pretty disparaging comments to make on his ideas of furnishing. The flowers especially, daily arranged in vases by his bearer, came in for a lot of criticism. They looked all right to Bob, and he defended his room loyally. She loved Baldur though, and was petting him all the time.

She had spent all the morning at their new bungalow, arranging the furniture, unpacking the curtains and other kit, and getting it all in order. Betty and Mrs. Clarke had helped her. She and Bob decided to go and have another look at everything after tea, and Sally got up to return to the Clarkes for lunch.

When Bob turned up to fetch her after tea, she enquired what his bearer was doing with sundry parcels under his arm.

"Oh," said Bob, "those are my pictures. I thought we might as well get them hung up today."

Sally was not so sure, as Bob's pictures consisted of coloured plates cut out of the weekly illustrated papers, and had been framed in the bazaar. At length a compromise was reached, and he was told he could put them up in his dressing-room, so off they went to the bungalow to spend a very happy few hours furnishing.

He had sent round his collection of small "prayer rugs", and was very pleased that

Sally liked them. His curtains, however, pink cotton, were condemned at once and given to the bearer. Bob was sorry to see them go, as he had thought them rather nice.

Baldur meanwhile, nosing around, had caught a mouse, and brought it to Sally for approval. He laid it at her feet and sat back, wagging his tail proudly. All work had to be stopped while he was made a great fuss of, and told what a beautiful, clever boy he was. He then went off to sleep in a corner, and the victim had to be disposed of in the garden.

The days passed quickly furnishing their little house, and the morning of their wedding was on them almost before they knew it. They were married in the little garrison church, and the usual guard of honour was provided by the regiment, who made an archway of swords for them to pass under.

For their honeymoon they went down to Delhi for ten days, and stayed at the Marina. It was the season and there were dances every night at one or other of the big hotels or the Gymkhana Club. It was lucky that his father had been so generous in giving Bob a large cheque for a wedding present, for money flowed like water in Delhi during the season, and it would have spoilt their happiness if they had had to count each penny. As it was they had a wonderful ten days, and Bob was happy he did not have to deny Sally anything.

They were back in Nurkhet soon after Christmas, and by New Year were settled in their house. Baldur was very glad to see them home again, and seemed almost to have transferred his affections to Sally, for he followed her from room to room and watched her every movement.

Sally was perfectly happy, and spent most of her day arranging this or that in the house, as she was not yet satisfied that it was ready. In the evenings they usually played golf together, or tennis, and then went to the Club, or had some people in to drinks in the bungalow. They made many friends and had generally more invitations than they could accept.

* * *

Nurkhet was a Station which was rather out of the ordinary, for it was the nearest Station to the Frontier in which wives and families were allowed to be present. All officers who were stationed beyond Nurkhet, that is beyond the Durand Line, in places like Bhorkhel, and Raid Ali, left their families in Nurkhet where there was a Family Camp kept up for their benefit. This consisted of a series of small two-roomed tin huts, each occupied by a married couple, and a central building where all fed together.

It was rather a lonely life for those wives whose husbands were beyond the Frontier, for it was seldom that they could get more than

one short week-end with them in a month, and as was the inevitable consequence of a lot of very bored women herded together, quarrels were frequent. The little huts all crowded into the small compound reminded one irresistibly of some strange prison camp, and it was not unlike one as far as spying went, for with nothing else to do, everyone minded each other's business.

When the telephone rang, even if it was not for them, every wife strained her ears to hear what was being said, and would ask the lucky one when she returned from the phone, with an elaborate air of unconcern, "Oh, is your husband coming down?" giving the word 'husband' a queer emphasis, which made one think they were trying to distinguish between that and the unfortunate woman's—whoever might be the present centre of gossip—lover. Actually in their loneliness, quite a few did have young subalterns in tow, but whether or not they were their lovers should have been nobody's business but their own. Only in the Family Camp it was quite the opposite.

Sally had remarked on this to Bob more than once, and said, "You know, darling, when the regiment goes beyond here, I don't want to have to move into the Camp. I hate the atmosphere there. Everyone watching everyone else, and hoping to catch them out doing something horrid. Couldn't we possibly keep on our bungalow?"

Bob explained to her. "It's almost impossible you see, dear, as the bungalows are for the regiment actually in Nurkhet, and the Camp has been specially built for 'abandoned women'! So I hardly think we'll manage to keep this on. But it's a year ahead yet, darling, so let's not bother so soon."

He hoped to get "long leave" the following year, as he was nearly sixteen months overdue, so should, with any luck, get a little while longer in consequence at home. Unfortunately, although Bob got a free first-class passage home when going on "long leave", Sally did not, as in the eyes of the Army, they were 'married in sin',—that is to say, Bob was still under thirty years old. Until he reached that magic age, he neither got marriage allowance, increased lodging allowance, or free passage money home for Sally. It meant they would have to travel home Tourist again, because Bob could not afford anything better. He would get his passage paid, and with that help, hoped to have enough to pay the little extra needed to secure a double berth cabin to themselves.

For troops the marriage age was only twenty-six in the British Army, while the Indian Army sepoy had no such age limit imposed upon him. Evidently an officer, though supposedly better educated, was not so likely to know his own mind, and had therefore to be protected.

* * *

In February and March what were known as Columns took place. This consisted of a force from Nurkhet marching out for about three or four days, sometimes as long as a week, into tribal territory. The idea of thus 'showing the flag' was supposed to impress the tribes with the fact that the Army was always near at hand, and in strength. Actually there was little likelihood of trouble, for the district round Nurkhet was quite friendly, but it was never safe to trust the wild hillmen too implicitly, for some religious fanatic, or 'fakir', could stir up a religious war in very little time.

On the three columns which went out in February and March, very little did occur, and only on three or four nights were they sniped at all, and that at extreme range. Nevertheless, Sally was very glad when April came, though it meant the hot weather and parting from Bob to go to the hills, for she used to live in a fever of anxiety all the time the columns were out.

By April Nurkhet had become very hot and sticky, and the general exodus up to the Kashmir hills began. Some families went early, but most were staying on until the first of May. Bob wanted to send Sally early, but she assured him the heat would be quite bearable till then, but by the time May arrived, she was not looking too well, and he realised it was time she got away. It only meant a separation of one month, as Bob's leave had been sanctioned, and they were due to sail for home in June.

So Sally departed, together with Baldur who was feeling the heat with his thick coat, and Bob was left behind to pack up the bungalow, store the furniture which belonged to them, and fetch Sally three weeks later from the hills to go home.

He found the ensuing month a difficult one financially, as it was an expensive business keeping up two establishments, himself in the Mess again, and Sally in Kashmir, and not being thirty yet, he got no marriage allowance, which made things even harder. He gave up drinking and smoking, and resigned from the Club, but even then found it none too easy. He did not touch his credit in the bank, which was the remainder of the wedding cheques from his and Sally's fathers, for that had to pay for her passage home.

Still, he managed somehow, and at the end of May they left Karachi by Anchor Line (which was all one class—Cabin class—and better than Tourist), having left Baldur in Fatty's care.

They had a very nice big outside cabin, and were extremely comfortable, which was lucky, as Sally was going to have a baby which she said would be born about November, and found the intense heat of the Red Sea in early June very trying. Bob worried a good deal, as he imagined awful things happening to her, so was very glad when the Suez Canal was behind them and the ship steaming in the cooler waters

of the Mediterranean. He decided also, as Sally was not well, to go all the way round by sea, and not across France by train. This would be much more restful for her than the train journey, and as they had eight months this leave, the little extra time it took was immaterial.

He cabled to her people, with whom they were going to stay most of their time, and told them they would be a week later getting home.

# CHAPTER XXIII

SALLY was very happy to be home again, more so than Bob who really did not care very much where he was so long as he was with her. Actually he looked on their bungalow at Nurkhet as their real home. London was very hot and stuffy, and the Princeps were just about to move to their house near Hindhead. It was cooler there, and much nicer than being in Town.

They were both very pleased about the baby coming, especially the old man, who made heavy jokes about it to Bob, and also already talking about schools and career. He seemed to have decided already that it was to be a boy, though Bob wanted a girl, but he did not say so.

He bought a small second-hand car for fifteen pounds, and though it was nothing to look at, the wheels went round and it got about. Sally and he had a lot of fun out of it, and went all over the countryside exploring, and if it broke down, they would spend the night at the nearest inn to where they had come to grief, and telephone for the Princeps' chauffeur to come and rescue them next day.

It was on one of their drives that Bob met Leslie again. He had not heard from him for nearly six months, when Leslie had written to say he had got a job, but never said what it was. They were driving along the Great West road one afternoon on their way to Camberley where Bob said he wanted to see Sandhurst again, when they came to a new roadhouse. It was getting near tea-time, so Sally suggested they should stop, and they drove in. It was Leslie who came forward to show them to a table. The surprise was mutual.

Bob spoke first and asked, "Whatever are you doing here?"

Leslie rather self-consciously replied, "I am doing manager here at the moment, and Anne does the cake-making. It's not too bad, as the pay is 'livable on', and this is one of a chain of horses run by quite a decent company."

He called out over his shoulder, "Anne, come out here a minute. Someone you know has arrived."

Anne came through a door at the end of the tea-room. She was wearing an apron, and looked hot and untidy. Evidently she had just been cooking over a hot oven. She was obviously embarrassed at Sally seeing her like that, and after a few minutes made her excuses and went back to her cakes.

While they had tea served by a neat little waitress, Leslie sat with them and asked many

questions about the regiment and everyone in it.

"You know, Bob," he said, "we grumbled like hell and cursed the old man a lot, but those were happy days. We never had any money, cursed about leave, but had a damned good time. Look at me now. I get just enough to scrape along with, but I have to be polite to most awful swine, and call them 'Sir' when I'd like to boot them in the backside. Poor little Anne! She is doing a skivvy's work, but never blames me. I'd give anything to be back in the battalion. God! I was a bloody fool to chuck my hand in. At least you can live like a gentleman there, and they were a good crowd on the whole."

Neither Bob nor Sally knew what to say, and were glad to finish their tea and leave. As they went Leslie said:

"Drop in again, old boy, and have a talk, will you?"

Bob said he would try, but decided it would be better not to, in his own mind.

Bob had seen his people quite a few times, and generally he and Sally went down to stay one or two week-ends a month. It was pleasant by the seaside, and somehow, now he was married, he seemed to get on better with them all. His sister was not yet married, and so far as he could make out, no definite date had yet been fixed for the wedding. He asked John Spencer about it, but all he answered was:

"I don't know, Bob. Mary doesn't seem to want to fix it definitely yet, and I don't like to worry her. After all, she's only twenty-one, so we can afford to wait. Especially as I'm only twenty-seven."

"So am I," said Bob, "but I've been married nearly a year, and Sally is only twenty-three now. Why don't you assert yourself more? Say you want a date fixed—and soon—or you'll break off the engagement."

John was horrified, and not a little alarmed.

"Good heavens, Bob," he said. "You haven't been talking like that to Mary, have you? You haven't told her that I am fed up with waiting, or anything awful, have you?"

Bob was very irritated.

"Of course I have. I told her straight it was a damned bad show fooling about year after year. She seemed to realise it too, so if you'll only stick up for yourself a bit more, you'll get on much better."

Bob saw what John was up against. Mary was still the 'baby' of the family, and he was going to have a difficult time. Already he had had to promise that, after they were married, Mary and he would come down to Hove every week-end. This meant that, though Saturday and Sunday were his only holidays, he was not going to spend them in his own little home, but

have to trapeze all the way down to Hove each week.

However, it was useless to speak to John. He was a very pleasant fellow, but far too fond of Mary. He would never put his foot down, either before or after his marriage—if that ever took place. So Bob did not bother to say any more. He and Sally were too happy to worry much about other people's affairs, and so the weeks passed very happily.

It was one evening in late August that Bob saw newspaper placards which read, "Heavy fighting on North West Frontier – British column ambushed –many casualties." He bought a paper and read that the normal peace column from Nurkhet had gone out and had been heavily engaged within a few miles of its starting point. No names of killed or wounded were given, but only that it was feared to be a large number.

He hurried back home and showed the news to Sally. She was very worried, and asked was it likely he would be recalled. He said it all depended on how many officers the regiment had lost, and if a major campaign was going to follow. They listened anxiously to the wireless that night, for the names would probably have got through by then.

The announcer spoke: "The names of the casualties in the fighting of yesterday on the North West Frontier of India have come to

hand." He started reading: "The 17th Punjab Rifles. Killed, Lt. Colonel J. R. Jackson, Lieutenant L. M. Waters, and twenty-seven Indian other ranks. Wounded: Captain F. J. Smith, Captain T. Bowley, Subedars Alif Din, Ran Singh, Jemadar Balwant Singh, and thirty-two other ranks. The 40th Native Foot: Killed....."

Bob switched off; he only wanted to hear his own regiment's losses. They were very heavy for a Frontier show, and appalled him.

"My God!" He turned to Sally. "The poor old Blimp has gone. Damned bad luck, as he was within three months of going on pension. We used to get infuriated with him often enough, but he was a nice old chap. Waters was a new chap, just transferred from the British Service, and joined after we left. It must have been a pretty bloody show."

The old General said to him: "It sounds as if only two regiments were in the column. Is that right?"

Bob told him that the Nurkhet column only consisted of two battalions, and a squadron of cavalry.

The General then asked, "But what about guns? Don't you have a Mountain Battery with you?"

"No, not when we are supposed to be on a peace column like this was. I can't understand

it though, as all round there is supposed to be so friendly. Last year the tribesmen used to come and chat with our Mussulman sepoys when we were in camp in their area."

The old General then got on to his campaigns on the Frontier. He held forth for quite a long time on how time and again the same mistakes were made, and only after a fresh bunch of casualties did they seem to remember the lessons of the previous wars up there.

He said to Bob: "Now mark my words, my boy, if there is a big campaign to follow, there will be the same bloomers made as there were in '97. I know."

Bob did not argue about it, but went out to send a cable to the regiment saying how sorry he was to hear its bad news. For an Indian regiment with only about seven officers present, the casualties were very heavy, and he was almost sure he would be recalled, but he did not tell Sally this.

It was next day about tea-time that the cable came. It was quite brief, and merely said: "Report back for duty Nurkhet immediately". Sally was upstairs resting, so he showed the message to his father-in-law, who sympathised and said it was very bad luck, but he obviously had to go and as soon as possible.

They looked up the P. & O. sailings and found a boat had left two days previously and

was due at Marseilles in about another four or five. If he went overland or by air, he could catch it comfortably, and have a few days to get ready. He rang up his agents and gave them instructions to book his passage. As he did so, he thought with certain gloomy satisfaction that anyhow he saved his money on his return ticket, for on recall, the Government paid and the passage money did not come out of one's grant.

He then went upstairs to tell Sally. She was sitting up in bed drinking her tea. She had just woken up, and looked very sleepy-eyed. She put down her cup and stretched lazily.

"Come and kiss me, darling. I've had a lovely sleep."

He went over to the bedside. "I'm sorry, darlingest, but I've had bad news. I've got to go back."

Sally was very upset. "Oh, Bobby dear, you can't go. Not when I'm ill. Tell them I'm ill. I want you here with me when it all happens. I'm so frightened, and now you'll go and get killed."

She was crying hysterically. He tried to calm her down, but it was a long time before she stopped sobbing. Then she suddenly announced: "I know. I'll come too."

Bob had all his work cut out persuading her it was impossible. "No, dearest, you can't

travel now, and it would be much better to have the baby here in your own home. If you came to Nurkhet you'd be alone, as I'll be out wherever they are fighting. I'd hate that, sweetheart. I'd much rather know you were safe and sound here. So be a brave darling and I'll be back again soon. Probably within a couple of months. These little Frontier shows never last long."

He tried to cheer her up, but she was very unhappy, and cried often as he packed his trunks and got ready to go. He went down to Hove to say good-bye to his parents, and then came the day he had to leave Sally. She extracted promise after promise from him, all of which he gravely swore to keep.

"Now, darling, you mustn't be a hero, and try to get a medal or anything silly like that. Promise me ?"

He did.

"Always have lots of men in front of you, darling, and keep away from any firing. Let the others get the medals. I don't want them, so you needn't think I'll be proud. I'll be very angry if you try to do something brave."

She was very upset and clung to him when they had to part. Her mother told him not to worry, as Sally would be quite well, but he was anxious in case all the excitement and disappointment of his recall might make her ill.

He promised her to do all she said, and she in return said she would not worry, and would try to be happy. The train started to move—he kissed her again, and jumped for his carriage. Leaning far out, he waved until a bend in the line hid the forlorn little figure which was flapping a tiny crumpled handkerchief unhappily after him.

He hoped she would be all right, but was terribly worried about her, and had a depressing journey back. He wondered if the busy days ahead would help to keep his mind occupied, and so pass the time more quickly till he was with her again.

# CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Bob arrived back in Nurkhet he found preparations being made for quite a big campaign. It had been decided to open up the tribal territory concerned in the attack, and build a road into it. With the inevitable opposition which would be encountered it was unlikely that it would last less than six months at the very least. However, he wrote to Sally and assured her he would be back probably just before Christmas, and told her not to worry.

The various columns moved out again towards the third week in September, and encountered determined opposition all the way. Behind the fighting troops came the engineers building the road at an average speed of about a quarter of a mile a day. It was a slow business as the ground was rocky, and the further they advanced, the more mountainous it became, till fifty or sixty yards was considered good.

The days were very full ones for everybody, and at night one was too tired to think much, but just dropped off to sleep immediately, so the time passed quite quickly. The weather was fine until November when rain and snow began to fall. Then the physical discomforts

of the campaign began to be felt, and everyone wished to hurry up and get it over.

The tribesmen would never stand out in the open and fight, but would maintain their guerilla tactics, of which they were past masters and harry the columns from tops of crags, and from inaccessible mountains and nullahs. They had to be dislodged each time, and it was very disheartening, after a hard climb, to find perhaps one or two empty cartridge cases alone to mark where the enemy had been a few moments before. This was repeated day after day ad nauseam.

At night the camps would be sniped all through the hours of darkness. It was not often that any men were hit as they were well dug down, but the transport horses and mules standing out in the open were not so fortunate. They were frequently wounded, and though the mules, however badly hurt, seldom made a sound, the screaming of the horses was very unpleasant to hear.

Bob had been expecting daily to get a telegram saying a baby had been born, and when at last it came, forwarded by lorry transport from Nurkhet, he tore it open eagerly. For a moment or two he could not understand it, and then gradually his stunned senses gathered what the message had to say. He read that she had given birth to a daughter, but it was not that that interested him. He could only read

the last words over and over again, "Sally dangerously ill. Will keep you informed."

He wondered desperately what he could do. He felt so powerless, stuck out in the middle of the wilds. He could not even send Sally a wire to try to make her happier, and perhaps help her get better, for he felt certain that a great deal of her illness was brought on by worrying about him.

He went in search of the Colonel, a man he liked and who was really only a Major holding temporary rank owing to the previous C.O. being killed. He was sitting in his tent, and looked up as Bob entered.

"Hullo, Bob," he said, "is anything the matter? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

Bob handed him the telegram, and asked, "What can I do, Sir? I am stuck here, and my wife is dying and wants me."

The Colonel thought for a bit and then said, "Try the signals, Bob. They are damned good chaps, and can wireless a message in relays to Nurkhet, and get someone there to send on your message for you. Cheer up! It may not be so bad as you think."

Bob went out to find the Signal officer, and explained his trouble. The Signaller said he would do his best, and Bob wrote a long message to Sally. He watched it being tapped out on the key. Somehow he felt all his hopes

hung on the fingers of the operator. If only his wire could get to Sally, she would be all right.

He turned to the Signal officer. "I don't know how to thank you for this, and I hope you won't get into a row for sending a private message. Will you let me know how much your chap the other end pays for it at Nurkhet?"

"That's quite all right, old man. Don't worry about payment. We can fix all that when this war ends. I hope everything turns out O.K. for you. That's all we need worry about. Let me know if I can help you another time."

Bob went slowly back to his tent. He was thinking of Sally, seeing her laughing, crying, and remembering all her funny little ways. She was so alive and dear. Surely it was all a bad dream. Sally could not die. He said it over and over again, till it became a kind of charm, and he almost lulled himself into a queer feeling of belief in it, and went into the Mess tent a little more cheerful.

The Colonel had told the others his news, and they all very tactfully avoided the subject, and it was almost like any other normal Mess night. Bob ate what was put in front of him, and talked mechanically to his fellow officers, but in later days he realised he could remember nothing of what had occurred that evening.

He got through the next day somehow, and found the hard work helped a lot, but as the battalion marched back towards camp, all

his fears rushed back over him. When they got to their lines he felt he could not go into the Mess. He knew a wire would be there for him.

Fatty said to him, "Come on, Bob. I'll see if there is anything for you. Go to your tent, and I'll be along in a minute."

Bob sat in his tent. Fatty came back, a red envelope in his hand. He handed it to Bob, who took it and held it in his hands. At last he handed it back.

"Take it, Fatty. I can't open it. Tell me what it says."

Fatty opened the envelope. To Bob, watching him desperately, it seemed he took hours over it. He took out the message, and read it. His face told Bob all he wanted to know. He stretched out his hand for the wire. Fatty handed it to him and left him alone in the tent. He went to see the Colonel and tell him what had happened. He found him in the office tent and, walking in, saluted.

"I'm afraid, Sir, that Kemplcy's wife is dead. He got a wire tonight. He's taking it damned badly, so I thought you'd better know."

The Colonel went along to see Bob, and found him sitting gazing into space, holding the wire in his hands. He looked dazed, and took no notice of the C.O. coming in, and hardly listened to his words of sympathy, but dimly heard him say.

"Would you care to get away for a little while, Bob? I think I could wangle ten days for you as a special case."

Bob shook his head. "No thank you, Sir. I might just as well be here now, and I know everyone here." He felt he couldn't bear to be alone just yet.

* * *

The next few weeks passed in a kind of daze for Bob. He went about in a dull ache of misery, and did all his work automatically. Everyone was very kind to him, and did not mind when he made silly mistakes or forgot things and thereby gave someone a little extra work in consequence.

He got two letters from home, one from his parents saying how sorry they were, and another from Sally's mother. Her letter was very long, and she was broken-hearted at her daughter's death, and wrote:

"She got your long telegram the evening before she died. I read it to her as she was too weak to read it herself. It made her very happy, Bob, my dear, and she went to sleep that night with it clutched in her hand. She never regained consciousness, and died towards morning quite peacefully and in no pain.

"Your little daughter is with us, and we have a very good nurse for her. Now, my dear, you must not feel bitter towards the poor little

mite. Remember she is Sally's, and Sally would have loved her. You will not want to be worried just yet, but when you feel you can decide, write and let us know what you want to do about her—her christening, future home, and everything.

"Your father-in-law and I both want you to know how much we love the little thing, so don't imagine she is unwelcome here. We will be only too glad to keep her and let this be her home, as we hope you too consider it yours."

Bob folded the letter and put it in his pocket. He was so glad Sally had got his message. He felt a little happier. But he could not yet work up any interest or affection for his baby. He would write about her later. It was Sally he wanted.

Eventually he felt he had to write to Lady Princep about his child. He had no idea of what to do about it, and wondered wretchedly how he could look after her. He supposed vaguely that he needed a nurse, but beyond that he was lost. He wrote to his mother-in-law:—

"I feel I can make no arrangements here, and until this war is ended and I come off the Frontier, I shall have no home for my baby. May I therefore leave her with you until I can get leave, which I hope will be sometime early next year, when we can talk it all over. Your letter was such a comfort to me, and it is so

nice to know that our baby is with people who love her. I cannot write about Sally--I suppose in time one gets over things, but at the moment I dare not look into the future alone without her. I am so happy I still have a little of her left with me in our baby, who I want to be called after her. Please write again to me soon and tell me about her.

"If it is no trouble to you, will you please leave all Sally's things as they are? I would like to pack them myself when I come home."

He sealed the letter and posted it. He knew her mother would not mind leaving Sally's room untouched. In a big house, one room did not count. His letters and ring had gone with her, but there were all her clothes, her little private treasures that he knew she would rather no one else touched.

So now there was left just him and the baby Sally. An odd pair somehow. Bob hoped he would be able to look after her and make her happy, but he felt very helpless about it all.

# CHAPTER XXV

CHRISTMAS was spent out in a camp which was slightly more comfortable than usual. It was situated high above the river valley along which the new road was winding, and in the rainstorms of December and January kept much drier than usual as the water did not settle, but ran down the hillside. Nevertheless it was bitterly cold, and most people put on every article of clothing they possessed.

On New Year's Eve they held a little celebration in the Mess, sitting six feet underground with the tent walls rising cosily above them. A large wood fire burned in the home-made fireplace, and a chimney of old petrol tins carried away the smoke. There was a lot of good-natured grumbling, and after dinner, when the rum had been passed round a few times, they started asking one another, "Where were you this time last year?"

Bob and Fatty vividly remembered their last New Year. He had been in Ratanagar then, and Sally had come down to spend it with him. A lot had happened since then. He fell silent and gave himself over to his thoughts. Suddenly he looked up and saw Fatty was watching him. He knew what was passing in Bob's

mind, and he was rather sad too, as he had been fond of Sally.

They both went off to Bob's tent after dinner. Neither felt like bed, so with a bottle of whisky between them, decided to talk and see the New Year in. There was no road-making the next day, which meant a rest for the protective troops who would therefore have a holiday in camp, so it meant a nice long lie-in in bed. There was a brilliant moon, and the hills all round glistened in their mantles of snow. They sat deep down in the tent with the flap drawn back, so they could see out into the night.

They were talking quietly when all at once very heavy firing broke out, and the bullets whined and hummed over their heads. The firing grew in intensity, and Bob heard the Adjutant telling everyone to man the walls. Fatty and he tumbled out and, strapping on their belts and revolvers, ran to their companies. The men were gazing over the stone perimeter intently into the distance. They could see the flashes from the tribesmen's rifles, and also hear now and again a dull thud as the bullets hit some animal or man.

The machine guns started, and their harsh 'tat-tat-tat' echoed through the hills. Still no enemy could be seen, and only the little orange flashes stabbing into the darkness showed where they were.

Suddenly a drum started throbbing, and with loud shouts and cries, a line of men came leaping down the hillside towards the camp. They were met with a terrific burst of fire from the camp, but came nearer with incredible speed. Mad desire to kill, and in killing to die for Islam, lent them fanatical strength, but against the automatic weapons of the defenders only a few succeeded in reaching the walls, and a mere handful jumped over, to be bayoneted inside.

Within twenty minutes all was quiet, and the moon shone serenely as before over a landscape white with snow; with a dark line of huddled figures on the hillside, and here and there, higher up, an indistinct shape trying to crawl away.

Bob went in search of Fatty. He was unhurt, and after they had seen their few wounded comfortably settled in the hospital tent, and that all was once more normal, they went back to Bob's tent and talked till nearly morning.

* * *

And so the little war dragged on for week after week, with no signs of the tribes making peace. Each day was like the one preceding it—an early start at dawn, followed by a long day of protecting the road-makers, and the return to camp just before dark, tired out and only wanting to drop into bed and sleep. Prospects of leave seemed very remote, although a system

had now been evolved which gave every regiment on operations a month's rest, thereby enabling officers to get away for ten days to the hills in rotation.

The 17th Punjab Rifles were late on the list, and did not find themselves back in Nurkhet till April. In a way this was all to the good, as it meant the hill stations would just be filling up, and be climatically at their best.

The two junior subalterns, Bob and Fatty, were told they could go for the last ten days of the month, so they sat and sweated, and passed the time as best they could in the intense heat of Nurkhet. They had decided on a small Native State near Kashmir. It would not be quite so expensive as the well-known resorts like Gulmarg and Srinagar, but quite a few people went there each year, so it should be a change.

They had written to a kind of hostel kept for convalescent officers, to which, so long as there was room, non-convalescents could also go. It had the advantage of being very cheap, and from all accounts was rather a nice place to stay. "Anyhow," they said to each other, "almost any hovel will be better than the camps we've had for the last five months," so hiring a car, both started for Dharampur.

It took them most of the day to get there, and in the tightly-packed car—for they had brought their bearers and dogs—it was not a

comfortable journey. At tea-time they drew up outside the Officers' Home, and were met by Mrs. Brown who was running it, and whose husband was a retired Indian Army doctor.

She was a large fat woman, and never stopped talking for a moment. In a very little while she had told them all there was to know, or in her opinion worth knowing, about Dharampur. Evidently the rest of the women there must have rather looked down on her, for she was most vitriolic about them, and if half of what she said was true, then it must have been a queer place.

"You watch out," she told them. "They don't care about me at all, but watch the new arrivals here right enough. All of you sick officers who come here get your arrival put in Station Orders, and as soon as these women see them, they ring me up and tell me to tell you to come round for drinks. Well, I expect they can't help it, but I'm thankful I'm not made like that."

"Sour grapes, the old cow," said Fatty in a whisper to Bob, who was hard put to it not to laugh, for there he was, the hypocrite, being as charming as he knew how to Mrs. Brown, and all the while making these quiet asides to Bob. Fatty had such a plump innocent face, and talked—when he wanted to—with the frank open gaze of the accomplished liar, that he usually took people incompletely. Mother Brown, by the end of tea, was bridling and be-

having like a young flapper. Bob wondered what was Fatty's game.

He soon found out, for it appeared she had a car, and as her husband had gone away for a few days' shooting in the Central Provinces, the car was lying idle in the garage, and the cunning Fatty had decided that it would be better employed in taking him round the hilly roads of Dharampur. He did not have long to wait, for as tea was cleared away, he having led the conversation round to cars, was told:

"Yes, we have a car, but only the Major drives. So now, as he is away, it is just standing in the garage."

Fatty said, "But how inconvenient for you, Mrs. Brown. Please let me know if I can drive you anywhere at any time."

After that it was easy, and they were told to borrow the car whenever they liked. They therefore suggested that they should all three go to the Club that first evening. Mrs. Brown was a permanent member, and said she could sign them in for ten days.

The Club was like any other Club in India, and the same people seemed to be in it. In fact, one could visit almost any Station in the country and very nearly be able to find one's way about the local Club. They were all the same. Only the location differed, and if in a hill station, there were usually more women than men.

Such was the case in the Dharampur Club. There were about five or six women to each man, which made visiting the bar an expensive business, for even if one sat alone with one's particular little party, three or four other women asked could they join up, and of course never 'stood a round'. Perhaps it was only natural in a way that subalterns, who knew that probably the husbands in the Plains had a good deal more money than they themselves, felt they were fair game and should give something in return.

Bob and Fatty soon got to know a few nice people, but as far as Bob was concerned, he had no interest in anyone. He stood his share of drinks, and joined Fatty in giving a party or two at the Club, but his heart was not in it. Fatty, on the other hand, was all the success that Bob was not. He was liked by everyone, and thought most amusing company. Had it not been for him, Bob would quite likely have been dropped as being a 'wet blanket'.

Some of the women, who Mrs. Brown had so inveighed against, and who were both attractive and obviously only too ready to be generous with these attractions, could not understand his complete indifference till Fatty told someone about Sally. This made Bob, to them, all the more interesting. He cursed Fatty savagely, but had to make the best of it. It was not that he was being smug or priggish, but that he was absolutely unmoved, and even

the most blatant suggestions passed over his head.

About three days after they had arrived in Dharampur, the Rajah of the State gave his annual ball. This was a most lavish entertainment, and invitations were much sought after by the very people who objected to 'a black man' being allowed to be an honorary member of the Club.

Bob and Fatty had both called at the Palace immediately they arrived, and had received invitations to attend the ball. Bob had actually met the Rajah in Delhi on his honeymoon, where the latter had been playing in the polo tournament, and knew him to be a most charming man. Sally's father, the old General, had been a friend of his, and the Rajah had sent her a most magnificent wedding present. He had heard of her death, and at the time written Bob a very nice letter. He had been educated at home, gone to Oxford, and made many English friends.

The evening of the day before the ball, Bob and Fatty were at the Club standing at the bar when a pretty little woman, Mrs. French, came up to them. She asked them were they going to the party, and when they said they were going, she answered:

"Well, I haven't called at the Palace yet, but I will tomorrow, and at the same time ask the A. D. C. for an invitation card. Of course

I suppose it means I'll have to dance with the man once, but I usually manage to avoid it."

She went away, and Bob looked at Fatty. They were not surprised, for they had come across that kind of thing before, and the A. D. C. had talked to them about it also.

He said to Fatty, "Do you wonder why they hate us when we do things like that to them? They're good enough when it comes to drinking their champagne, or taking a damned good party off them, but when it comes to a question of our women dancing with them oh no! Do you realise that Mrs. French, after actually asking to be invited, will consider it an insult if the old Rajah asks for a dance?"

"Yes, I know," said Fatty, "and the funny part of it is that very probably he knows as well as we do and everyone else that she is one of the hottest bits in Dharampur, and to a man like him, she is no better than a professional whore. Yet he would not insult her for the world. He is far too much of a gentleman for that, but God! how he must despise her -and for that matter, in spite of his European education, how he must despise most of the women up here."

"I expect you know what she is going to do, don't you?" asked Bob.

"What?"

"Well—just make up a party of her own at the ball. What could be nicer? Your own party—drinks free—good band. No need to dance with 'these bloody wogs'. No wonder they hate us so."

* * *

The ball was a most spectacular affair. The grounds of the Palace were illuminated, and coloured lights hung in the trees. On the terrace overlooking the lake, the fountains threw up rainbows high into the air, and the escort of State Lancers lining the steps were very smart in their yellow jackets and gold braid. There were seats scattered here and there for dancers to sit out, and many seemed to be taking full advantage of them.

Inside the Palace the band was playing the latest dance tunes. The Rajah had sent his own plane down to Calcutta for them, and was flying them back next day. Champagne flowed like water.

Bob was standing with Fatty watching the scene, when he saw the Rajah go over to a group of English people sitting at a side table. The men rose as he approached. They heard him ask a certain Mrs. Pringle for the pleasure of a dance, and her reply was quite audible.

"I am so sorry, Highness, but I'm having this with my husband. He will be back in a moment."

It was obvious to everyone the excuse was a poor one, but the Rajah only bowed and walked away.

He had had a few words with Bob and Fatty earlier in the evening, and once more expressed his sympathy at Sally's death. Bob told him he had a daughter, which came as a surprise.

His Highness asked, "I suppose the christening is over, is it not? You should have let me know. We are old friends, your father-in-law and I, and your wife often ran about these rooms as a child when they were my guests."

Bob murmured some reply, and as the Rajah turned away, saw him say something to his A.D.C. who made a note in a small book he produced. Evidently it was to remind him of Sally's daughter's christening, for some weeks later a very beautiful bracelet arrived with a charming letter regretting the lateness of the gift.

As the evening wore on, the effects of the champagne were beginning to be felt, and some parties were getting very noisy. It was then that His Highness gave the indication that the party was ending by rising and making his way towards the grand entrance. One or two people seemed to be grumbling at having to leave, but as it was nearly three o'clock, they evidently had little idea either of the hour or how long they had been there.

The guests were filing past the Rajah, who was standing on the steps surrounded by his personal Staff, and receiving the farewells and thanks, when from the bottom of the steps came the sound of breaking glass. An embarrassed figure was seen hurriedly entering a car, with a bottle of champagne lying broken in the drive. There was an awkward silence, in which the Rajah was heard saying to his senior A.D.C.:

"Captain Jawindar Singh, you will please see that a case of wine is placed in that Lady's car with my compliments."

He was quite composed, and it was his guests who felt the situation most keenly. The wretched culprit, now thoroughly sober and conscious of her crime, sat weeping in a corner of her car, which had been held up. A case was brought down the steps, placed in the motor, the A.D.C. saluted, and the car drove away.

The farewells and thanks continued as if nothing had occurred, but as Bob and Fatty said good-bye, they thought the Rajah looked faintly amused.

# CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN they got back to Nurkhet the heat was stifling, and the regiment was glad to go out on operations again, for although it meant a lot of rather dull and often hard work, the camp they were going to was at six thousand feet above sea-level, so would be pleasantly cool. The Colonel had been told by Headquarters that this was a 'permanent' camp, and he could safely let his officers make themselves comfortable in it, for they would not be moved again for at least six months.

The camp was a pleasant surprise, for the officers' tents were large and roomy, and well dug down, giving ample head room. Moreover they all had thatched roofs which kept out the heat of the sun. For a camp it was most luxurious, and the regiment was well content. They sent for furniture, carpets, and tin baths, and settled down to be really comfortable.

Bob went to the Colonel and asked if his dog Baldur, who was being looked after in Nurkhet and in his heavy coat feeling the heat terribly, could come up. He got permission, and Baldur arrived by lorry two days later. They were both very happy to be reunited.

Things were fairly quiet round their way, and it was not often that they were sniped. One day, however, the Political spies brought in word that the tribesmen were going to blow up a road bridge about three and a half miles south of the camp. It was decided to lay a trap for them, and Bob's company was the one chosen.

They marched out after dark and, picking their path across the hills, found their way by compass bearings to a nullah about four hundred yards above the bridge. From there they could see the road, and a little footpath along which the enemy would probably come. It was unlikely they would make the attempt before the early hours of the morning, so Bob, with his two platoons, settled down to wait.

The moon rose about one o'clock, and once it climbed above the rim of the surrounding hills, it lighted up the countryside and made the road stand out like a silver ribbon. Bob hoped they could not be seen from the bridge and, cautiously lifting his head, looked round at his men. They lay motionless and silent. It was unlikely that they would be distinguishable from the scrub and bush in which they lay, he decided. It was now very cold, and he wished he had a coat.

It was very quiet, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the occasional rustlings of the bushes in the light wind. Bob began to dream, and his thoughts were soon far away.

It did not seem at all real, this waiting to kill men, or perhaps be killed himself. Everything looked very peaceful in the moonlight. Suddenly he remembered Mamie, and the night they saw the Taj together in moonlight no less bright than this. He wondered where she was, and thought how strange a chance it was that brought two people together from the ends of the earth, then parted them again for ever. What was the reason, he wondered? There must be one, or it all seemed so pointless.

His thoughts strayed on, and he lived over again his short happiness with Sally. He could think about her now without it causing him the dreadful pain he felt at first. Somehow his memories of her made her seem so close again, and not as having left him at all. Then he tried to picture his little girl whom he had never seen. He wanted to see her terribly now, and all his first feeling of bitterness towards the little thing had given place to a deep love for her. He must try to get home and make some plans for her, he decided.

All this time his eyes had been turned towards the bridge. Suddenly he fancied a shadow had appeared on it. Had it been there all the time? Or was it a new one? He strained his eyes towards it. He must be sure, for if he fired too soon, the whole plan would be ruined. He listened desperately. He felt that hours had passed, and could feel his heart thudding with excitement against his

chest. The shadow did not move,—or did it? He could not be sure.

A hand touched his arm, and he looked round to find his Subadar had crawled up to him. He was pointing to the road, and whispered in Bob's ear:

"Sahib, do you see anything?"

Bob answered that he did think he had seen something, and both lay tense and silent side by side. At last the shadow moved, and a clink of metal was faintly heard. Evidently the enemy had decided that no one was in the vicinity, for two or three more ghostly shapes appeared on the bridge, and more could be heard under it in the shadow where they were probably placing the explosive.

Bob cautiously drew out his 'Verey' light pistol and, pointing it towards the road, fired. The magnesium flare roared up in a graceful arc, hovered for a moment, and fell towards the earth, lighting up the immediate surroundings as clearly as day. This was the signal they had fixed upon, and a heavy burst of fire was brought to bear on the bridge. For one paralysed moment the tribesmen stood stock-still in their surprise, and quite a few were hit and fell to the ground. The rest fled for cover, and started to fire on Bob's position.

He guessed that, under cover of this, they would try to remove their dead and wounded,

so continued a steady fire on the bridge and its approaches, for he wanted to recover their casualties himself for purposes of identification. For a few minutes the firing was quite heavy, and Bob heard a cry as one of his men was hit. The next moment he felt a jarring blow in his shoulder, and instinctively putting his hand to it, drew it away again warm and sticky. He did not feel any pain, and his shoulder seemed numb, but he tried to plug it up with his 'field dressing', and in the darkness, one-handed, he made some sort of a job at it, but hurt himself rather a lot.

The tribesmen apparently gave up their attempt to collect their casualties, for their firing ceased, and all was quiet. Bob's party, however, could not leave their position till dawn, so still had a couple of hours of waiting before them. His wound was now throbbing, and the loss of blood was making him feel weak and dizzy. He took out his brandy flask from his haversack and took a long pull at it. The fiery spirit burnt his throat, but he felt a lot better for it. He wished it would get light.

The hours passed, and at last a faint grey light appeared over the hills. The morning star rose, and with it came a bitter wind. His arm and shoulder were numb, and he felt very weak. He wondered was this 'dying'? The thought amused him in a way, and he felt an insane desire to laugh aloud.

Soon it was light enough to see, and he could take stock of their position. The tribesmen had evidently fled, but it was not safe to leave yet. Anyhow, the Colonel had arranged to send a company out in lorries at dawn to relieve him, so they only had a little longer to wait.

He looked round his little band of men, and found one was dead, and five were wounded, though not seriously. The dead man was only hit in the thigh, but lack of aid must have been the cause of his bleeding to death, for he lay in a great pool of blood. The Subadar helped Bob dress his own wound more securely. It had bled a lot and he was in great pain.

They could see from where they were the huddled bodies of the enemy lying on the bridge and on the road. None seemed to be moving, so perhaps the wounded had managed to crawl away somehow. They would be able to make sure as soon as the lorries arrived. They could already hear their engines drawing nearer, and in a few minutes they appeared round the bend, and stopped short of the bridge.

The company, with a section of machine guns, tumbled out and doubled away to take up positions on the hills each side of the road. Bob now felt he could safely evacuate his position, and gave the order to retire to the road. His signaller had flagged a message to the signallers who had come in the lorries, and

called for stretcher-bearers for the worse of the five wounded. He was walking himself, he decided, but found it harder than he imagined, for when he stood upright he found he barely had the strength to move, and only got to the lorries by hanging on to two sepoys who half carried him there.

Before being taken back to camp he said he wanted to see what had been the result of the night's bag. He saw seven tribesmen lying in the lorry. He calculated that at least as many more must have been wounded, and felt very pleased with himself. He suddenly felt deadly ill, and was sick all over the road. He vaguely remembered being carried into the ambulance, and knew no more till he woke in the hospital tent in camp. Meanwhile his wound had been washed and bandaged, and he felt a lot better.

The Colonel came to see him and sat by the bed.

"A damned good show, Bob. Seven of the b.....s killed, and the Political blokes say eleven were badly hit. How are you feeling?"

Bob said he felt quite comfortable.

The Colonel went on to say, "Well, it's home for you, the doctor says, so hurry up and get well so you can enjoy your leave better, but before you go, if you are well enough, I want you to write a report of the show last night.

Also any recommendations you want to put forward for decorations. Anyone you think put up a good show."

Bob was too tired to think much, but just said: "Subadar Alam Khan is one, Sir. I can't think of anyone else just now, but I'll write it all out."

The C. O. got up. "Well—cheerio, old man. You're off to hospital tomorrow, and sleep on this—your name's gone in for something."

He walked out. Bob felt very tired, and dozed off.

# CHAPTER XXVII

THE next day Bob was moved by ambulance to the Military Hospital at Nurkhet. Before he went he had arranged for Baldur to be looked after by Fatty, and for all his belongings to be packed up and sent after him, for he knew he would be away a long time. He had not had an easy night, and in spite of the morphia given him, had slept but little. He dreaded the journey down by ambulance, for the road was only a track in some places, and the Red Cross cars were very old and out of date. Some had not yet been converted from solid rubber to pneumatic tyres.

He and three wounded sepoys were packed into the car quite early, and they started for Nurkhet. It was a dreadful journey. For the first twenty miles they bumped and lurched over a rough track, and Bob's wound started bleeding again. Then when they reached level ground and the smooth main road, it was even worse, for the heat at that level was intense, and the interior of the ambulance was like an oven. The three sepoys lay in uncomplaining misery, and Bob too suffered silently, for he could not do otherwise in front of their stolid courage, and when at last, after three hours'

driving, they drew up in front of the hospital, they were all four practically unconscious.

Here they had their wounds dressed, were washed, and put in between clean sheets. It was a great relief, and Bob slept for several hours. He was awakened in the evening by the medical officer, who told him he was to be moved again next day to the hospital at Jalalabad where he would be operated on, but that it would not mean another ambulance journey, for all wounded were now being evacuated by air.

Bob was very thankful. He felt he could not have survived another journey like the one he had just completed.

Next morning early he, with six other bad cases, were driven out to the flying field, and then put into a large troop-carrying plane. Soon they were flying high above the hills amongst which he had fought and toiled for so many months, and in two and a half hours had reached Jalalabad.

"At last," thought Bob, "I can get a bit of peace. They will keep me here for good now."

The hospital was the largest in Northern India, and had all the facilities for dealing with any emergency. He was operated on next day, and woke up to find he could not move his left arm or shoulder at all, and his hand was bent upwards and kept in place by a stiff metal claw.

He asked the nursing sister why this was, and she told him: "The bullet passed through a nerve centre, and we are afraid your hand will drop and stiffen in a bent position, so it is counteracted by being forced back like that. Actually directly you are convalescent you are being sent home, where you'll get electrical treatment. We haven't got it here."

Bob hoped it would not be long, for he hated not being able to move, with its attendant humiliations of being washed and nursed like a baby. He felt that once he was up he would be all right, for lying motionless day in and day out made him fully conscious of the ceaseless throb of his wound. However, after a week he was propped up with pillows, and found he could, with great labour, write a few letters. As he had received many telegrams asking how he was, he found the answers he had to write passed the time fairly quickly.

In June he came up in front of a medical board, and heard he was to proceed home on sick leave. As the trooping season was over he had to travel P. & O. and take with him a sick attendant. This was an R.A.M.C. orderly, who was an excellent man, and Bob far preferred to have him round than any nursing sister. He took infinite trouble with Bob, was never impatient when he became peevish and complaining—as he quite often did—and did not seem to be able to do enough for him.

They travelled to Bombay by train, and Bob's bearer went with him. The journey was very trying, as the shade temperature was over 120° Fahrenheit, and it was the close stifling heat which preceded the monsoon. At Bombay, as he said good-bye to his bearer and gave him his pay in advance for the period he thought he would be away, Bob had to go through a most touching scene.

His bearer, Khan Mohammed Khan, who had been with him since he first joined over six years before, broke down and wept.

"Sahib, you are going away. My service with you might as well have been a dream or a picture show. It is all over. You will never come back. First the Memsahib is gone, and now you."

Bob was most upset, and promised him he would return, and also write regularly. Khan Mohammed then fumbled in his coat pocket and produced a dirty little scrap of paper with his address on it, and gave it to Bob, then hurried away, saying.

"Just one moment, sahib. I am coming back."

Bob waited. In a few minutes he saw Khan Mohammed returning, pushing his way through the crowd on the docks. He handed Bob a paper bag.

"Some peaches, Sahib. The fruit on the boat may not be good."

He turned to the orderly--"Look after my Sahib," then, seizing Bob's hands between his, he salaamed and left.

* * *

Bob and his orderly went on board and down to his cabin. He had to admit that the Government had done him very well. He had a single berth cabin with a bathroom adjoining it. Much better accommodation than he could ever have afforded himself. He went down to interview the chief steward in the dining saloon, and booked a table for two, as he did not want to sit with anyone else, because he still had to have his food cut up for him, and in fact everything else done for him, for his left arm was completely paralysed.

As the boat drew out from the dockside, Bob realised he felt no emotion of any sort. A year ago when he and Sally had leant over the rail together it had been exciting and lovely to watch Bombay receding into the distance. Now it just meant nothing. He was completely apathetic about whether he went home or stayed in India. He had no home in either place. His child he wanted to see, but he realised that, in fairness to her, he could not let her come back with him. He could not look after her. Living alone with just her father was no fair life to give a baby. She would have to stay with her grandparents. His mother-in-law had hinted at marrying again for

the child's sake, but he would not even think of it.

He was looking over the rail lost in thought when he heard a voice beside him.

"Bob, darling! Fancy you being here! The wounded hero—poor dear."

He looked round. There was Thelma laughing at him. He was very pleased to see her, and asked her what she was doing on board. She told him she was going home for a holiday, and as Peter could not get away till October, she was travelling alone. She was as pleased as he was to meet once more.

"Where are you sitting, Bob?" she asked. "You must change your table and come and sit at mine—I'm at the Purser's."

"I have to sit alone," he replied. "You see, I can't manage my food alone, and an orderly is with me, and he cuts it up. So we're at a table for two."

"All right," said Thelma. "We'll give the poor man a rest. I'll sit with you, and he can get his own food. You don't mind *me* looking after you, do you?" She smiled at him questioningly.

Bob realised that, far from minding, he liked the idea a lot, and went down to his cabin to tell his orderly he could go and have his own meals in the second class at the normal times, instead of having to wait till Bob had been

fed. He was a good fellow, and protested when he heard this.

"No, Sir, really, Sir, it's no trouble at all. I can wait for my food, Sir. I'd rather 'elp you with yours. You know you can't manage proper by yourself, Sir."

Bob laughed. "I don't have to, Simmonds. A Lady friend is doing that part of your job."

Simmonds was very pleased. "That's fine, Sir. Now you'll 'ave a bit of company at your dinner time. Better than my face across the table, Sir."

He disappeared towards the after end of the ship to get his lunch, and Bob went to collect Thelma.

When they sat down and she started to cut his meat for him, one or two people seemed faintly amused, but the ship's doctor, under whose orders Bob was for treatment, must have told the passengers at his table about him, and been overheard by his steward, who passed it on to the other table stewards, and so to the rest of the saloon, for no one else smiled, but seemed, on the other hand, to be just interested in him and Thelma.

# CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN Bob landed at Tilbury he found his father-in-law had driven down to meet him. The old man was very pleased to see him, but was distressed at his appearance, and asked him if he felt all right. Bob assured him he was quite well, but the General was not happy about him, and said.

"You know, my boy, this won't do at all. You look ten years older than you should, and about half as fat—but we'll soon fix that up at home."

Bob asked him how his baby was.

"Young Sally? A little devil. Full of life and crawling around all over the place. Dead spit of her mother."

They drove on in silence, and after about an hour drew up outside the house. Lady Princep was waiting for them, and came out to welcome Bob. She fussed over him like a child, and Bob found it very nice to relax and enjoy all the comfort, both mental and physical, that he had been longing for.

She took him up to see the baby, and he stood for a long time looking down at her in her

cot. She was asleep, but even without seeing her dark eyes, he could recognise Sally in her. His mother-in-law was watching him.

"You've been worrying about her, haven't you, Bob?"

"Yes. I don t know how to look after her. How can I give her a normal life?" He turned towards Lady Princep. "What can I do? She must have a mother, or someone who'll be good to her. I can't impose on you and the General indefinitely, and I don't want to marry again."

She saw he was over-tired and almost hysterical.

"Now, my dear, you are not to upset yourself. There is plenty of time to think about all that when we have got you well again, and remember, Bob, this will always be yours and Sally's home. After all, she is our little girl's baby, so belongs to us too. Now you must not worry, or we'll be very angry with you."

The strain of the long day had told on Bob, and he went to bed early with a feverish headache. He slept for over fourteen hours, and awoke next morning feeling a lot better. His orderly came in to help him dress, for they had to go to the Central Military Hospital, where Bob had to report daily for treatment.

They left in the car, and when they got to the hospital, were seen by the medical officer.

He examined the wound and did not seem terribly pleased with its progress.

"Hmm!" he said. "Needs attention—hmm—but I hope it won't be necessary to open it up again."

Bob saw the enraged expression on his orderly's face. Evidently he deeply resented this aspersion on his professional abilities, and so directly they left the hospital, he hastened to calm his ruffled feelings. The orderly was about to leave him, and return to an R.A.M.C. unit, and Bob did not want him to go feeling that his work had been anything but excellent, which it had been, for he had really toiled day in and day out to make his patient comfortable. When the time came for him to return, Bob gave him a silver wristwatch with a little inscription engraved on the back. He was very pleased, and went off quite happy.

Meanwhile Bob attended hospital daily, and found endless happiness playing with little Sally. The rest of his days were spent in resting and reading. It was a peaceful life, and gradually he settled down and began once more to feel happier and more contented.

* * *

One morning about a month after he got back, as he sat up in bed having his breakfast, his father-in-law came in brandishing the Times. He was quite excited about something. Bob wondered vaguely what had happened.

"Congratulations, my boy," he said. "We are all proud of you. You've been given the M.C. It's in today's 'Gazette'. Come on, get up, we must celebrate this."

Bob was naturally pleased, but somehow it did not mean so much now that Sally was not there to share in it. She would have been so pleased. When the old General had gone, he lay staring out of the window —

"Sally, Sally, where are you, darling? I want to share this with you - are you proud, sweetheart?"

It meant so little if she couldn't share it.

His parents phoned during the morning. They were very pleased, and his father asked him when he was going to come down and stay with them. Bob told him that at the moment it was not possible as he still had to attend hospital daily, but directly he could manage it, he would be down. He realised he ought to go, for though they had come up to Town to see him once or twice, he knew they felt hurt that he was staying with his 'in-laws'. He also knew that they had hoped to look after baby Sally too.

He therefore asked the medical officer that morning, when he went for his appointment, if it would be possible to go down to Hove. He was told he could go, but for not more than a fortnight, and that as there was

no military hospital there, he would have to attend the County Hospital daily, and of course pay—treatment would not be free. He decided he had better go, and the medical officer wrote out his 'wound history' to be delivered to the doctor who would treat him in Hove.

When he reached home, he found that his parents were much the same as ever after the novelty of having their wounded son had worn off. Mary was still the idol of the family, and could obviously do no wrong. She had at last fixed the date of her wedding, which was to take place in September. John Spencer was very happy about it, and told Bob how lucky he thought he was, now everything was settled. Bob said nothing, but had his doubts as to whether it would take place.

He sent for Sally to come down as his parents wanted her, and she arrived with her nurse, a young and capable girl, and was immediately a great success in the house. Unfortunately his mother wanted to look after Sally herself, and this of course led to trouble with the nurse, who resented any of what she considered interference. She was only a young girl and could not stand up to the formidable attacks of the much older Mrs. Kempley. Bob had to protest at last, and peace was restored, at least a troubled peace.

Daily he, Sally, and her nurse would go down to the beach, and bask in the sun and

watch Sally playing on the hot sand. Bob found the nurse, Anna Green, a pleasant person to talk to, and found himself gradually looking at her more as a human being than before. Up till the time she had come to him and asked him to stand up for her, he had not thought of her as other than a kind of machine who looked after his child.

Perhaps it was her uniform that did it. She was obviously devoted to Sally, and it made Bob happy to realise his baby was in good hands. He decided one day to find out more about her, as if she was willing, perhaps it would help solve his difficulties, for with a good nurse, he could have Sally with him in India. This would relieve her grandparents of the responsibility of keeping her, which Bob felt he had no right to ask of an oldish couple like the Princeps.

One afternoon as they sat on the beach, he asked Anna about herself, and she was a little startled by his sudden interest in her.

"Well, Sir," she answered, "I was always fond of children, and so decided a nurse's job would be the nicest I could find. My father was a market gardener, and when his business failed, I had to leave school and find work. He used to be General Princep's batman in the war, as you know, Sir, and it was that that made Lady Princep engage me when I had no references and was quite inexperienced."

Bob broke in to ask, "How old are you now, Anna?"

"Seventeen, Sir—and a few months."

"And you've been looking after Sally for nearly a year now?"

"Yes. A year in December."

Bob thought for a while, and then said, "You know I go back to India as soon as my wound heals up, and I want to take Sally with me. The thing is, I need a nurse for her, and someone I know is fond of her. Would you care to come? And do you think your parents would allow it?"

Anna was delighted, and her eyes shone as she answered eagerly, "Oh yes, Mr. Bob. I know they'll agree, and I'd love to go to India and look after her."

She looked very young, and very pretty in her excitement. For the first time it crossed Bob's mind what would the sharp tongues in India say about him having a young girl in his house. He dismissed the idea impatiently. The child had to have a nurse, and that was that.

Mary was married in September, and she and John Spencer went for a motor tour of the Continent. This left the house in Hove rather empty, and Bob did not quite like going back to London till his sister returned, for they were taking a house in Haywards Heath near John's

work, and that would mean Mary would be near home. He wondered how she was getting on, for it was really rather pathetic to see how completely lost his mother was without her.

It was clear to him that he was hardly even a member of the family any more. His parents would talk of him to their friends, and proudly bring in his M.C., but as far as actual family ties went, he realised that his place had been filled long ago by Mary's husband. He found he did not mind very much. It was rather a lonely feeling at first to realise that he had not a home to come to any longer, but he saw he did not fit in, and that it was more for appearance sake than anything else that he had been asked down to Hove.

He decided to return to London, and in early October was once again in his old room at the Princeps' house. He felt much more comfortable there, and was genuinely fond of his father—and mother-in-law, and knew they felt the same towards him.

His wound was healing rapidly, and the medical officer at the hospital told him he would probably be fit for duty again by Christmas. This rather brought the question of Sally before him more urgently, and he asked his mother-in-law about taking Anna out to India. She was rather doubtful about it.

"You see, Bob, she is young, and unfortunately pretty, and you know what India is like.

In these small up-country Stations, in their boredom, the women will jump at a chance for gossip. It is not you so much, as it can't really hurt you, but Anna is a nice child, and it may damage her good name. Had you thought of that?"

"Yes, I'd thought of all that, but I want Sally with me, and Anna is her nurse. Wouldn't it be all right if I tried it, and if there was talk, then send them both back?"

Lady Princep thought for a while and then said, "Well—she is willing—and her parents agree. You can but try it, and if it works out well, then all the better, for you'll have your baby with you, and be happier."

So it was all fixed up, and in December the oddly assorted trio sailed for India,—Bob, Anna, and the child. They caused a lot of amused comment on the boat, but as far as he could see, no unpleasant insinuations were being made, and he thought perhaps everything would turn out all right.

On Christmas Day there was a children's party on board, and Bob took Sally to it. She was then only a year old, but seemed to take a lively interest in it all. Anna was there too, and saw that no disaster occurred. Bob still could not quite manage the more domestic details of Sally's daily existence, but in preparation for Anna's days off on reaching India, was doing his best to learn, and attended the bedtime

hour and watched closely the bathing, powdering, and other mysteries attending her pre-slumber toilet.

When she was finally settled, the remainder of the evening was free, and though Anna fed in the second class, she lived in the first class, and slept with Sally, so after dinner Bob would always ask her up on deck where sometimes they talked, or other times just sat silent.

He found an extraordinary amount of comfort in Anna, though she was so young, and gradually became used to discussing everything with her. She learnt all about the first Sally, and realised Bob felt her loss as keenly as ever before, and that he was a very lonely and unhappy man. She saw also that Sally the baby was a problem he did not even begin to know how to tackle, and though her youth and prettiness made her in great demand among the men on the boat, and though Bob told her to enjoy herself, and that her evenings were her own, out of some queer feeling of loyalty perhaps, or maybe sympathy for his obvious loneliness, she did not mix with the other passengers, but stayed by him.

When the boat reached Bombay they did not have to travel so far by rail as when Sally had come out to marry him, for Bob had been transferred to the training battalion of his regiment, and this was stationed in Bhawalpur in the Central Provinces. It was a nice little

cantonment, and not very big, as besides the training battalion, there was only a battery of Gunners, and it was rather like a large friendly family.

Bob had decided that Anna should not wear nurse's uniform in Bhawalpur, for that would reduce her status socially, and she was a cut above the sergeants and N.C.O's of the battery, who would think her fair game if she wore it. He told Anna of this, and explained to her that he wanted her to join the small Station Club, and in fact be like anyone else in the Station. She seemed quite happy about it all, and agreed to anything he suggested.

He said to her, "Things will be different here, Anna. You will have an 'ayah' to do all Sally's work, and you just see she is all right. In fact, you'll be a sort of companion-housekeeper to me."

He told her to stop calling him 'Sir'.

# CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN he got to Bhawalpur, Bob, with the cunning of long residence in small Indian stations, went straight to the Colonel's wife—who was also the senior lady in the cantonment—and explained Anna. He was very clever, and asked her to help him.

"You see, Mrs. Lyons," he said, putting on a 'I've only you I can go to for advice' look, "Sally needs a home life, and I can't look after her alone. She had to have a nurse, and Anna was the one my mother-in-law engaged, and had been with her a year when I arrived. She is young, I know, and a lady, but what could I do? If you'll tell everyone it is all right, I know she'll get a fair deal."

He looked at her hopefully. Mrs. Lyons was a kind-hearted woman, and Bob to her was a pathetic figure, left alone with just a baby girl he could not look after, and so she assured him it would be perfectly all right. She moreover liked the little feeling of importance it gave her—she was 'in the know'. Tomorrow at morning bridge she could tell her lady friends all about it, and how she had helped Bob. He realised he had a powerful ally, for if the senior

lady told the rest that 'I know all Bob's affairs and there is nothing in it', no one would dare question her pronouncement.

He asked Mrs. Lyons had Anna better be a relation? She pondered deeply, and then decided a cousin would meet the mark. So Anna became Bob's cousin, and as such was accepted - on the surface at any rate—by the Bhawalpur English community. He felt very pleased with himself, for he had killed two birds with one stone. Sally had someone to look after her who was fond of her, and Anna was under the wing of the 'Senior Lady'.

It was still cool in Bhawalpur, and would remain so until April, so Bob sent for all his furniture from store in Nurkhet, and settled down in his new bungalow. The garden ran down to the banks of the river, and he liked sitting out in the evenings and watching the dusk fall. Anna was perfectly happy, and with looking after Sally and running the house, she had her hands full. Bob's responsibility was the garden, and he took great delight in seeing the results of his handiwork appearing in full bloom.

In the evening, after he had played tennis or hacked around the cantonment, he would return home to find two low chairs on the lawn, with a table set with drinks, and Anna waiting for him. Sally was usually in bed by this time, and he and Anna would sit together and talk.

It was the loveliest time of the day, for with the setting of the sun, a soft light, halfway between day and night, fell over the countryside, and for a short half hour or so, a thousand scents would be carried to them on the evening breeze. The river flowed by silently at their feet, and the twilight song of India, the few notes of the birds, the chirping of crickets, with now and again faintly in the distance from across the water, the muffled beat of a drum or plaintive notes of a flute, were all that could be heard.

He asked Anna one such evening. "Are you glad you came out here, Anna? Do you think you will begin to miss home, and want to return to England?"

She was quite alarmed. "Oh no, Bob. I love it here. It is more wonderful than I ever imagined, and this feels like my own house now. There is Sally to look after, and all the managing to do, and then these lovely evenings out here. There is nothing so beautiful at home. I never want to go back."

He smiled at her. "You never know, Anna. One day it may suddenly pall on you, but I hope not yet, for if you go, we shall miss you, Sally and I."

Quite often people would drop in for a drink before dinner, and Anna always acted as hostess. She was popular in the Station, and what was more important, the women liked her,

so she was saved the unpleasantness any girl they disliked would have drawn down upon herself. There were one or two subalterns in the Station who seemed attracted by her, and one especially, George Seymour, seemed very struck with her, for he kept asking her to ride with him, and having a little money, had several polo ponies which he placed at her disposal.

Anna was fond of riding, and used to take Bob's horse out before breakfast every day with Sally in a basket affair straddling a minute pony, and attached to her horse by a leading rein. Baldur would follow, barking excitedly behind, and when Sally's short walk around was over, and Anna went off alone for a quick gallop, he would tear along beside her. George Seymour learnt of these rides alone, and asked Anna if he could accompany her. She really preferred to be alone, but had not the heart to say 'No', as he was a nice young fellow, and was so obviously fond of her.

Bob was glad she was enjoying herself, but he began to miss her company in the evenings, and when sitting out alone by the river, found he wished she was there with him. For now she went to the Club with Seymour two or three times a week, and even on the days when she did stay home, he quite often dropped in before dinner, and Bob felt he had to ask him to stay on and have 'pot-luck' with them. He tried very hard to be glad that Anna had a friend

and was happy, but he missed the days he had her to himself, and regretted the intrusion of Seymour. It was not as if Anna took advantage of his good nature, for Sally was still her spoilt child, but Bob felt the comfortable little intimacy of the house had ended, and began to leave her and Seymour together when he called round.

Gradually he felt lonelier and lonelier, and withdrew into his shell. The old happy atmosphere of the little bungalow was gone, and though he told himself he had no right to resent Anna having a friend, that he was definitely not in love with her, he hated Seymour and so went out of his way to be polite to him.

Things went on in that way till April when Bob told Anna it was time to move to the hills with Sally, and as they sat out together—for once alone again—he asked her if she minded the move.

"No, of course not, Bob," she replied. "Sally must get away from the heat of the plains, and naturally I go with her. After all, though you've been sweet about it and pretended about me, I am her nurse, aren't I?"

Bob took the plunge and very awkwardly asked her about George Seymour, for he felt it unfair to ruin her chances if she was fond of him, so said.

"But, Anna, I told you before that you must not feel bound to stay. If you'd rather

remain here, you must say so. If you don't want to leave any friends, you must tell me."

She stared at him in unfeigned surprise. "What friends should I mind leaving?"

He replied hesitantly. "You seem to get on very well with Seymour."

Anna laughed. "Oh, Bob—so that is why you've always left me when he comes round. No, I don't mind leaving him a bit. He is amusing company, so I rode with him. You said you wanted me to, and I didn't want you to feel I had to take up all your time I thought you were glad to find someone to entertain me so you could get away by yourself."

Bob stared at her. "I've missed our evenings out here together."

"So have I."

They both suddenly felt terribly happy, and the old feeling of contented intimacy descended on them once again.

When the time came for the move to the hills, Bob made all the necessary arrangements and had rented a small bungalow in Sarauli. He would move into the Mess while Sally and Anna were away, so only needed one servant, his bearer. The rest went up with Anna. At the last moment he decided that it was not right to let a young girl go off alone, so told

his bearer, who had now been with him nearly eight years, to go with them. He would be responsible for Sally and Anna, and Bob felt more at ease knowing he was with them, for Khan Mohammed was devoted to him, and would therefore see no harm came to either the baby or Anna. Baldur accompanied them.

After they had left Bob felt very lonely. The Mess was not like his little house, and he missed the welcome home he looked forward to so much when he returned to his bungalow in the evenings. He was being looked after by a temporary bearer, and found he hated a strange servant messing about in his room. He counted the days to June which he had decided was as soon as he could reasonably ask for ten days' leave and go to join Anna in the hills for a short while.

Meanwhile he eagerly waited for her daily letter, and felt childishly disappointed when she missed a mail. Evidently Sally was doing very well in the cool climate, and it was obvious Anna loved the hills, for her letters, after she first gave the news about the baby, were full of her walks, the funny little hill ponies, the big silver-grey monkeys, and a hundred other things she did up there. Bob used to love reading her round, childish hand. It was a change to find someone so genuinely enthusiastic and interested in everything. So many of the women were permanently bored, and

only woke up when sex or some piece of peculiarly vicious scandal was mentioned.

The hot weather was a particularly bad one that year in Bhawalpur, and the monsoon did not break till very late. The few people left in the Station got more and more affected by the fierce heat, and seldom stirred out of their bungalows unless it was absolutely necessary. Parades finished at eight o'clock, and after breakfast no one went out into the open before six in the evening. After doing his office work Bob would have an early lunch of fruit and biscuits, and then go back to his bungalow where he would lie naked and sweating under the fan till it got cool enough to go out and take some short but violent exercise.

The saving grace of the Station was the nightly evening breeze which came from across the river. This made sleeping out of doors pleasant, and for long hours Bob would lie awake staring up at the great stars, and lose himself utterly in space. He loved those cool nights outside, and luxuriated in the feeling of being alone and undisturbed. His mind would weave queer fancies, and he would plan wild schemes which never came to pass.

Or he would lie, his mind a blank, just listening. There was no silence in those Indian nights before the monsoon. A thousand sounds would rise and fall upon the soft air. The crickets chirped endlessly, giant bats or flying-

foxes flew overhead, and in brushing the leaves of the big trees in the garden, disturbed the birds whose sleeping places they were, and who would grumble angrily and sleep again.

But no matter the hour of night, or the myriad other sounds competing, ever in the distance was the throb of a drum. Muffled but insistent, the steady inexorable beat overcame time and distance. Then at midnight would come the scream of jackals, and sleep became impossible till dawn drove them back into the drains and holes in which they lived by day.

# CHAPTER XXX

In the training battalion there was an Indian officer from the fourth battalion. He was a very nice fellow and had spent a great deal of his life in England. Educated at an English public school, he had gone on to Sandhurst, and come back to India very Europeanised. Bob had actually been at Sandhurst with him, but in a different company, so they had not met before coming together in the training battalion at Bhawalpur.

Yussuf Khan was very fair-skinned, wore European clothes all the time, and used to talk of 'going home' for his leave. He did not mean his home in India, but England. He was an interesting chap to talk to, and being one of the few officers of Bob's age, they got on well together.

One day when Bob was round at Yussuf Khan's bungalow having a drink after a strenuous game of squash, he asked him: "Yussuf, what do you think of Indianisation? How do you think it's working in our fourth battalion?"

Yussuf did not take long to think out his reply. "The way it's being done now is bloody hopeless," he said. "Look who you are giving

commissions to, and what type of man is coming in nowadays. When I was at the R.M.C. I met all you chaps, and had been at school in England, and I am as English as any foreigner can be. I understand you, and like you, and have your ideas. So did all the others of that date. Now anyone can get in. You don't choose fellows any more like we were chosen, from old loyalist fighting families, but you hold an examination open to anyone. Naturally the babu type, the Indian clerk, gets top marks. Or the son of a rich moneylender, who hates English rule, but spends money on his son's education so as to use his position as an officer later on to further his own ends. They have never been out of India, don't ever meet you chaps, and believe all that Congress agitators tell them."

Bob asked him, "But are there any of those in our fourth batt?"

"Yes, unfortunately. About half a dozen all told."

"How do you treat them though, among yourselves? After all, they are supposed to be your own countrymen, aren't they?"

Yussuf Khan laughed. "Countrymen, my eye! We treat them just like you would treat a little tick. Kick them up the backside. One of them came into Mess one day with a 'caste mark' painted on his forehead. We soon had that off."

Just then Mrs. Yussuf Khan joined them on the lawn. She wore a sari, for few Indian

ladies ever took to European dress under any circumstances. She smiled pleasantly at Bob, and asked after Sally. Bob told her she was in the hills with Anna, and that he hoped to join them up there soon. He asked her when she would be leaving the plains, or was she not going to the hills that year?

"No, I am staying down this summer. Really I think the exodus to the hills is not so necessary as is made out, for if one has a cool bungalow, fans, and does not go out during the hottest hours of the day, there is little risk of getting ill. Admit it, Bob, you only send away your family because it is the custom, and you are afraid people will say you are selfish if you keep them down here."

Bob thought for a bit and had to admit there was a lot of sound sense in what she said. Nearly everything one did was 'custom'. The same old rules of pre-Mutiny days persisted all over India. Nowhere in the world was such rigid observance of obsolete customs kept up. The smaller the Station, the worse it was. All ideas of values seemed to be reversed. Most bare-faced adultery, if it could be ever so lightly veiled, was pardoned if the culprits were 'Sahibs', but some small social bloomer, perhaps not changing for the late session of the pictures—that was serious. One must keep up appearances.

Bob decided that he was sick of being alone, and also it was very expensive maintaining two

separate establishments with himself in the Mess and his child and Anna in the hills. It would be easier next year for he would become eligible for marriage allowance, and in addition, added lodging allowance. This would make a big difference, but at the present moment he was finding it difficult to keep things going. If he could not get any leave himself, he would send for Anna and Sally as soon as the rains came and it had cooled down a little.

Anna still wrote regularly asking when they might expect him, so he decided to ask for leave straight away. Unfortunately the Adjutant went sick with sand-fly fever, and Bob found he was detailed to do that job as well as his own. He wrote to Anna and told her he would not be able to get away. She did not answer for quite a while, and when finally her letter came, it sounded as if she was disappointed, and she did not seem to think that it was so impossible for him to get away as he made out.

The days dragged on, and in July, when the monsoon had set in fairly steadily, he thought it almost cool enough to fetch down the family. However, before he had time to write, he got a letter from Anna telling him she had just got engaged to George Seymour. Bob knew that Seymour was on leave in Sarauli, but Anna's letters so seldom even mentioned him that it came as a great shock to Bob. He could not cope with it. Anna of all people. She was

only a child herself, and had said so often that she wanted to stay with Sally and him.

He read over her letter again, "……he is nice, and I think I am very fond of him, and I do so want a home and babies of my own. Of course I shall stay with you till you can get a new nurse for Sally. I do hope, Bob dear, that you won't be angry with me."

He folded the letter slowly and went off to the Mess for a drink. There he showed the letter to Yussuf Khan and asked him what he could do about it. He felt quite stranded, for he had begun to rely on Anna far more than he had imagined.

They both went back to Yussuf's bungalow to ask his wife for advice. Perhaps she would know of someone who would look after Sally. Bob felt he must arrange it soon, for it was not fair to keep Anna on when he knew she was only staying through loyalty to him.

Mrs. Khan read the letter and then looked at Bob. "I expected something like this, Bob" she said. "You are very blind, aren't you, and don't know women so well as you think."

Bob asked her what she meant and said to her, "But Anna told me before that he meant nothing to her before she went to the hills. She said she wanted to stay with Sally, and that she felt that the bungalow was her own."

"Perhaps she does still. Perhaps she does not really love young Seymour," said Mrs. Khan, "but maybe she is fond enough of him to marry him. However, she will tell you herself no doubt when she gets back, and meanwhile, let me see—I think I know a good half-caste girl who would nurse Sally."

Bob felt very unhappy. His little home was to be changed again. Sally would hate a new nurse, and a 'chi-chi' at that. He'd hate a stranger in the house too. He wished Anna would come back, but there were still three weeks before her return.

Bob tried to get the house ready before she got back, for he wanted it to look nice for her return. The garden was a blaze of colour, for with the monsoon the flowers had blossomed, and the big 'golden mohur' trees on the bank of the river were aflame with vivid red and orange bloom. He had had the rooms done up, and the house looked very nice. The day they were due back he filled Anna's room and the nursery with flowers. He then went down to the station to meet the train.

When it pulled into the station and Anna stepped out carrying Sally, Bob suddenly realised how very much he had missed her. He ran forward to meet her and took her hands in his.

"Anna, my dear, you look so nice. It is lovely seeing you again."

Sally let out a yell from the platform where she had been put down. He picked her up, and they made their way to where Bob had a taxi waiting. As they drove to the bungalow, he noticed Anna was very silent, but he was too excited to worry why. It never occurred to him to ask after her fiancé.

When Anna went into her room on arriving at the bungalow, he followed her in to see if she liked the new decorations. He watched her anxiously. She looked around, and said.

"Why, Bob, this is lovely. Did you think of it?"

He answered, "Yes. I thought you'd like it, and it helped pass the time planning all this. But do you like the flowers? I got the seeds from Calcutta."

She laughed. "Bob dear, they're lovely, but I must re-arrange them or they'll die. You've put far too many in each vase."

He did not mind, but dragged her off to see the nursery where he had pasted "Mickey Mouse" strips round the walls, and thought Sally would love them. He was very pleased at the success of his room. Sally loved it, and Anna was full of praise. He got quite conceited about it. He told Anna to have her bath and change, and then come out on the lawn for drinks before dinner.

She did not take long, and Bob was only alone for a few minutes before she joined him, looking fresh and cool in a pretty little semi-evening frock. He showed her round the garden, and then they sat down and talked. He suddenly remembered to wish her happiness with Seymour. Her face seemed to cloud over a little, or perhaps it was his imagination.

"I hope you'll be very happy, Anna. Sally and I will miss you a lot, but we were lucky to have you for so long. It's been very lonely without you here, and it's going to be worse when you go. I've got a half-caste girl for Sally, but I'm afraid she'll hate her. I know I do."

"Oh, Bob—please stop. You make me feel awful."

Anna got up and ran into the house. Bob stared after her. He felt very bewildered, and wondered what was the matter. He waited a few minutes, but she did not return, and when dinner was announced, she was still in her room.

He knocked at the door and went in. Anna was stretched out on the bed sobbing bitterly. He was terribly upset, and went to her and tried to comfort her. He held her in his arms like a baby and patted her shoulder.

"Anna darling. Poor little girl. What is the matter?"

"I feel so awful. I can't leave you and Sally ever."

He laughed at her and said, "Now, now, you mustn't be unhappy. You'll have your own babies, and forget about us."

She was very angry. "No, Bob, never! You've been so dear to me. I feel so selfish going away."

He did his best to make her happy again.

George Seymour was then on a Course so did not return to Bhawalpur. However, Bob noticed he wrote to Anna every day, and one morning a letter arrived from him for Bob. He read it, said nothing, but went off to see Mrs. Lyons, who had returned from the hills. When he returned he found Anna waiting for him. She asked him what had George written to him about? She had recognised his writing on the envelope.

Bob had to tell her. "Well, Anna, you know now that you and he are engaged, he feels quite rightly that it does not look well for you to go on living here with me. So I have been round to Mrs. Lyons, and she says she will put you up till you get married."

Anna was not pleased, and said so most vehemently. "But, Bob, I can't leave you now. Sally hates that half-caste girl, and so do you. What will you do if I go?"

"Oh, we'll be all right, dear. Anyhow, that is not the point any longer. We must not stand in the way of your future happiness, so

you will go to Mrs. Lyons tomorrow, and I'll send Sally home to her grand-parents."

Anna started crying most bitterly. "Oh, Bob, you loved this little house. It was home to you, and you were so nice to me. I can't go away. I won't—I won't. And I won't marry him. I hate him. Please let me go home with Sally. I want to look after her, please. But I can't stay here any longer. I can't. Please don't ask why, Bob, please. I must go away."

He tried to dissuade her from her decision, but she was firm, and he only upset her when he tried. There was only one thing to do, so he booked a passage for her and Sally and fixed up their departure. George Seymour sent one or two frantic telegrams, and wrote to Bob also, but eventually even he gave up the struggle, for Anna, for all her diminutive size, was a most determined little person.

For the few days before she left, the bungalow was not a very happy spot, and in a way, though it meant loneliness for him again, Bob was quite glad when the day came that he travelled down in the train to Bombay to see Sally and Anna off on the boat. He had written to Lady Princep and told her of the return of Anna, and fixed up for her and the child to stay with them.

When he finally got them on board and settled in the cabin, he spoke to Anna and told

her to cheer up and not worry. It did no good and only upset them both. When the gong went for all friends to get ashore, Anna flung her arms round his neck and wept bitterly.

"Oh, Bob, I've been so hopeless and such a failure. I'll never forgive myself."

He kissed her and petted her. "Don't cry, Anna. You've been wonderful, and I'll miss you terribly. Write often and don't worry. I'll be home next year and then we can start again."

The ship's siren hooted three times. He said good-bye again. Anna clung to him desperately. He felt terribly lonely. They kissed and murmured stupid nothings to each other. At last he had to go. She came up on to the deck with him. As the boat drew away from the dock, he saw her little figure waving from the rails till at last distance blurred it and he could see nothing.

He turned away and went back to his hotel. He thought all the time about Anna. Did he love her? He could not really answer that question. All he knew was that he was going back to an empty bungalow. He was alone once more. There would be no more happy evenings by the river. He would miss Anna terribly. He cursed George Seymour savagely. Why the devil did he have to come along and spoil everything?

# CHAPTER XXXI

AFTER Anna and Sally had left, Bob soon fell back into his old bachelor routine. As the Princeps refused to accept any payment for their keep, the fact of Anna and the baby going home made a great saving for Bob. He now found that he could join the Club again, and if he really wanted it, treat himself to the odd week-end away.

At first he felt very lonely in the house all by himself, but eventually the feeling wore off, and he began to like his solitary existence. Nevertheless he wrote faithfully to Anna each week, though the letters became shorter and shorter.

There were still about two or three weeks of the hill station 'season' left, so he made up his mind to ask for ten days' leave and go up to Sarauli. By this time the Adjutant had returned to duty, and there was no reason why Bob should not get away for a short while. Once he made up his mind and had his leave granted, he found he was quite excited about it, and counted the days to going away.

By working-in the usual Thursday holiday observed by the Army throughout India, he

managed to get away on Wednesday afternoon, and early next morning was in Sarauli. This time he had enough money, so went to the best hotel. It was very full, but he managed to get a room after a little trouble, and was soon settled in.

After lunch he retired to bed for his afternoon nap, for his years in India had made it such a habit with him that if he ever missed it, no matter what he was doing, his head would begin to nod, and by three o'clock he would be in a grim condition, waging a desperate but losing battle against an overpowering desire to sleep. This did not go down very well on the one or two occasions on which he had been persuaded to play tennis in the early hours.

After tea, taken at ease in bed, he set out, accompanied by the ever-present Baldur, to explore Sarauli. It was too early to go to the Club, so he decided to get a few duty calls done with, and then it would be late enough to find a few people round the Gymkhana bar.

As he walked up the hill towards the Club, he suddenly came face to face with George Seymour, who had evidently finished his Course and was spending his last few days up at Sarauli before going back to Bhawalpur.

At first they were both rather awkward and silent, but when they got to the Club and sat behind a couple of 'chota pegs', Seymour said what was on his mind. He was inclined to

think Bob had turned Anna against him, but soon he realised that Bob was as surprised as he was over the whole business.

Bob told him, "I don't know what to make of it myself. You see, when she came back she seemed quite happy—I admit I was fed up at the idea of her leaving, but I quite saw your point that she couldn't stay in the house any longer, and in fact I made arrangements for her to go to Mrs. Lyons. Well, I told her this, and suddenly she said she didn't want to leave Sally, and wanted to go home. Said she couldn't stay in India any longer."

Seymour brooded over the matter. "Boy! Two chota pegs," he shouted, and thought deeply. Both by now felt very friendly. Each realised that soon his tongue would run away with him, and though he tried hard, he would not be able to stop it, and confidences would come tumbling out, to be bitterly regretted next day.

"Boy! Two 'barra pegs'," said Bob. He was sick of small ones. He thought Seymour an excellent fellow.

"Two 'barra pegs'," shouted George a moment later.

George Seymour told Bob that there was a dance that night at the Royal Hotel, and opined that it would be worth going to. There was always a superfluity of partners at these

hill station dances, and so, although they had fixed up no party, they decided to go together. Bob asked George to dine at his hotel, for it would be more convenient for the dance, so they separated before eight o'clock to change for dinner.

During dinner they took stock of their fellow guests. Both George and Bob were in the mood to find little fault with anything. In fact they sat eating in a pleasant haze, but even to their kindly eyes, as George remarked, "There are a few hot bits here, old boy."

Sarauli was very gay that year, and the proportion of women to men was about ten or twelve to every man. They could therefore more or less take their choice, so when the dancing started, they walked into the ball-room and soon found partners to dance with.

In the bar the drinking was tremendous. Bob had to admit even to himself that it was the heaviest he had seen in India. There was no room round the bar for everybody, and even the high stools were doing double work, for most of the men had a girl sitting on his knees. They were all very excited, and the noise was terrific. No one knew which was his or her glass, and ended up usually by sharing.

Bob watched the Indian bearers. He wondered what they thought of it all. They who kept their women veiled, and to whom this public caressing was as bad as making love.

However, long experience of the "Sahibs" and their "Mems" had inured them to shocks, and their faces showed no surprise. All Sahibs were mad anyway.

Bob had found a little woman, by name of Daphne Baxter. Her husband was down in the plains. She was a bright little thing, about twenty-nine or thirty he judged, and seemed a bit bored with the amusements Sarauli had to offer her. They danced together most of the evening, and when not dancing, sat out in the hotel gardens. It was almost cold out of doors but very pleasant, for the air was full of the scent of pines.

George Seymour had apparently 'clicked' with someone, for after the first dance, when Bob saw him with a plump young nursing sister, he seemed to have disappeared. Bob did not worry, for he found Daphne good company, and they were getting on very well together.

They danced again, and then Bob suggested they leave the Royal.

"It's getting hot and dull in here," he said. "Shall we go for a walk? It's nice outside, and we needn't stay out long."

Daphne was willing, and got her cloak and joined him outside the front entrance. They started to walk slowly towards the further side of the hill where the cantonments ended and the pine woods began. Arm in arm they reached

the trees, and he made a comfortable place for her to sit amongst the pine needles.

For a long time they were silent, and then Daphne asked him, "Are you married, Bob?"

He told her he was, and added: "But my wife died the year before last, and now I just have the baby, who is in England."

"Was that your baby up here last month with a young and rather pretty nurse? Anna something or other?"

"Yes, they're home now."

They sat a little longer, then started back. He found that she was staying at the Royal too. Before saying good-night, he asked her to have coffee with him next morning at Lorang's in the town. She said she would, and they parted.

Bob went to bed and was asleep almost at once. He woke late, and remembered vaguely the events of the night before, and realised he had made an appointment for eleven o'clock. He tried to conjure up a mental picture of Daphne, but realised that, beyond a vague outline, he had very little idea of what she looked like. She was dark and small, he knew that much anyway.

After breakfast in bed he had a bath and phoned the bureau and asked to be put through to her room. A sleepy voice answered him:

"No, I've not forgotten. Give me half an hour and I'll meet you in the lounge."

For the first time for months, he took a lot of trouble over his clothes. He suddenly felt he wanted to look nice. Why, he did not ask himself. It was useless to get too friendly—he remembered she had told him she was married and had two children. However, for some unaccountable reason, he felt something was going to happen. Something to do with him and her.

When he got down to the lounge he found she had not yet arrived, so sat down to wait. He was lost in a daydream when he suddenly heard a voice at his side:

"Good morning. I'm not late, am I?"

He looked up and saw Daphne smiling at him. She looked very pretty in a little green outfit with a close-fitting green hat to match. Her brown curls peeped out from under the tight little cap, and she looked very young and attractive. They started to walk to Lorang's, the meeting place of all Sarauli for 'elevenses', and as they walked, talked about trivial things. Bob thought her very sweet.

From that first morning they seemed attracted to each other, and for the next ten days of Bob's leave, they were seldom out of each other's company. Neither realised they were falling in love, or if they did, thought themselves strong enough to fight against it.

The night before Bob was due to leave they had dinner together, and afterwards walked out

to the pine woods under the bright moonlight. When they sat down, they found they had nothing to say to each other. Bob wanted to tell her he loved her, but felt he had no right to. They sat silent and unhappy, each desperately conscious of the other's nearness and the parting so soon to come.

Bob turned to Daphne, and saw tears glistening on her cheeks. She was crying quite quietly, and tried to hide her face from him. He put his arms round her shoulders, and she nestled close into him. They strained to each other, both miserably unhappy and not knowing what to do.

"Daphne, darling, don't cry. I can't bear to see you unhappy, my sweet. Things will be all right, darling. You mustn't cry. Look at me, and let me kiss your tears away, darling. You are such a baby, aren't you? And your eyes are so big and dark in the moonlight."

They kissed passionately. She was so unhappy, and cried uncontrollably in his arms.

"Oh, Bob darling. I can't go back to him now. I can't. It was so awful before I met you, but now it is worse. My babies are the only happy thing about my marriage. You must help me. I can't go back. Please, Bob darling, think of something."

He did not know what to do, but tried to comfort her, and when she seemed calmer, they

tried to find some solution to their difficulty. It all seemed so hopeless.

She told him about her husband. He was nineteen years older than she, and they had nothing in common any longer. They had been married eight years, and to her he was now an old man. She was devoted to her two children, but to him they meant nothing. He was still in love with Daphne, and would not leave her alone. Bob listened with a cold sick feeling, as she told him about her home life.

"I can't leave him, Bob, and he'll never divorce me. He once said that if he couldn't have me, no one else would. He knows I can't bear him near me, but is always telling me how much he still loves me, and when he touches me, it is hell! And I have to give in sometimes or he'll take away the children."

To Bob, who loved her, it was torture to think of her going back to be made love to by anyone else. He tried not to think of it, but found it beat on his brain till he felt it would drive him crazy. There was no way out for them, and he knew he could never share her with anyone else. She knew they could never be lovers either, for her life with her husband standing between them would never let them know happiness.

At first she said she would run away with him, but Bob realised that in the end she would want her children, and he could not ask her to

give up everything for him. Perhaps their passion would blind her to their loss for a while, but in the end she might blame him for her children being taken from her, and then they would never be happy.

It was late when they returned to the hotel. Daphne seemed exhausted, and near to breaking down. They said good-bye and kissed miserably. He would be gone before she awoke next morning.

# CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Bob got back to Bhawalpur he felt utterly miserable. He had not been so unhappy or lonely since Sally had died. He became morose and introspective, and seldom went to the Club or met any of his fellow officers. He began to believe that he would never know happiness again. When Sally died he thought he could never love anyone again. Then had come Anna. He had never loved her, but when she was in Bhawalpur he had at least had a home, and had his child with him, and if he had not been really happy, he had at least been content.

Now he had fallen passionately in love with Daphne, and she was never to be his. Instead of trying to forget her, he purposely forced himself to think of her, and in his blackest moods would deliberately picture her in her husband's arms. and torture himself till he was near to breaking point. He now took to drinking very heavily, and what was more dangerous drinking alone in his bungalow and far into the night.

At first he wrote to Daphne, wild and unhappy letters, and heard from her in return,

but one day a letter came from her asking him not to write any more as it made things more difficult, and did not help either of them. Bob saw she was right and that it was hopeless to go on planning and hoping, so wrote no more.

One day his Colonel sent for him to his bungalow, and Bob found him alone in his study. He knocked at the door, and was told to come in. The Colonel offered him a drink and said:

"Sit down, Kempley, and make yourself comfortable. I want to have a talk with you."

Bob hastily searched his memory for any possible crime he might have committed, but could think of no reason for the coming interview. He soon learned what was troubling his commanding officer, for as soon as he saw Bob settled and listening, he began to speak again.

"You must not mind me being personal, Kempley, and don't think I want to pry into your private affairs, but as you know, I am responsible for you as your C. O., and since you came down from the hills you appear to have changed considerably. After your wife died it was natural you should want to be alone and even want to get away, but when you were here with your child and Anna you were quite all right. You went out, met people, and were popular. Since they left, and since you came back from Sarauli, you have been a different person. You never go out, and your wine bill

is twice as large as I like a bill to be, for a subaltern. You must be drinking alone in your quarters, and I don't like it."

Bob interrupted to ask. "Have you any complaint to make about my work, Sir?"

"No, your work has always been quite satisfactory. It is not that I worry about. If that was all, it would be easier, but you know that work is not everything in the Army. In fact, some people say it is the least important part, though I wouldn't go so far as to say that myself. It is the social side of the question that is worrying me about you. At the rate you are going, you will not have a friend left in a couple of months, and I can't have that happen to one of my officers. Did anything happen up in Sarauli? Or is it something wrong at home? You know that nothing you tell me will go any further, and I may be able to help you."

"Nothing is the matter, Sir," replied Bob. "What was the trouble is finished now, so you cannot help me, though I appreciate your kindness and I promise I'll try to behave like I was before."

He got up to go, but the C. O. waved him back into his chair.

"No hurry, my boy. Now the official part is over, we can have a chat and another drink. Come into the other room. Mrs. Lyons is there and so are the Smithsons."

Bob followed him in, and stayed talking till nearly dinner time. He then had to leave to change in time for Mess. The Smithsons offered him a lift back to his bungalow, which he accepted gladly.

After he had left and the noise of the car died away down the drive, the Colonel turned to Mrs. Lyons and said.

"I am worried about Kempley. I talked to him tonight, as you know, but got nothing out of him. He swore to me that nothing was the matter, but anyone can see with half an eye that he has something on his mind, and something that is worrying him a lot."

Bob did not go straight home after all, for the Smithsons asked him to stay and have "pot-luck" with them, and remembering his promise to Colonel Lyons to try and be more sociable, he thought he had better start at once, and said he would love to accept. It was later than they thought, and by the time they had had a couple more short drinks before dinner, it was nearly nine o'clock when they sat down to eat.

The dinner was the usual six course affair, for though the invitation was for "pot-luck", an Indian cook was never at a loss and took it as a matter for personal "izzat" or honour to produce a meal at the last moment as good as if he had had a couple of days' notice of the guest. Afterwards they sat on the verandah

and listened to the wireless. The voice of the Announcer said:

"In exactly fifteen seconds you will hear Big Ben strike six o'clock British summer time, that is, five p. m. by Greenwich mean time."

The notes of Big Ben thundered into the cool Indian night as clearly as if they had been standing in Parliament Square. When the last notes had died away, the Announcer's voice was heard again:

"We are now going over to the Thé Dansant at the Savoy Hotel where we shall hear Johnny Jackson and his 'Kings of Swing' from now until seven p.m., when Empire listeners will get the third news."

The moaning of saxophones and noisy rhythm of a jazz band then proceeded to drown the throb of a native drum being beaten in the servants' quarters at the bottom of the compound. They listened contentedly to each tune and felt they were not so cut off from home after all, and during the intervals between numbers, made the same remarks every exile in India made when listening in—"You might almost be in the room with them, mightn't you?—wonderful reception—we must try to get that tune for the Club gramophone." etc.

When the band leader announced into the microphone, and gave the name of the next tune, he sometimes added: "I hope listeners abroad

are having a good reception," they stirred comfortably and felt the message was meant especially for them, and so they were not forgotten at home.

Bob left at about eleven o'clock. He had thoroughly enjoyed his evening, and cycled home on Smithson's bearer's bicycle, feeling as happy as he had felt for months. His last thoughts in bed before dropping off to sleep were that he must get a wireless and give a party himself.

He awoke next morning and wondered why he felt so happy. It was Sunday, and so he could have a long lie in bed, and as he lay smoking his first cigarette of the day, he made his plans. Firstly he must do up the house again, for when Anna left, he had sent away all the furniture except for that in his own one room, and the bungalow looked very bare and uninviting. He wondered if she would come out again for Christmas. But the money part of it would be difficult. Perhaps he had better leave it for the moment.

His thoughts were interrupted by Baldur, who had just returned from his morning walk. He came blundering up to the bed and thrust his great head inside the mosquito net and licked and slobbered a 'Good morning' to Bob. He smelt terrible, and soon Bob saw why, for after his first welcome Baldur trotted off importantly and returned with his great surprise—a present for his master. To Bob's horror, a large

and ancient kipper's skin, salvaged from the Mess garbage tin, was placed tenderly on his sheets.

Baldur sat back waiting for the thanks he expected. He was very pleased. So far it had been a good day. The kipper, proclaiming its venerable age to high heaven, had to remain where it was till Baldur went away. His feelings would have been terribly hurt if it had been thrown out in front of him. At last the sudden shrill chirrupping of a chipmunk near at hand necessitated instant investigation. Off he went, and Bob, with a sigh of relief, hurled his present out into the compound. He then got up and, after a cold bath, went into breakfast in Mess.

After he had had his breakfast he returned to the bungalow and started straight away to make it habitable. He opened up the box-room and dragged out the trunks stored in it, and started unpacking curtains, pictures, and books. While doing this he came across once again the small attaché case in which he had locked up all Sally's letters. He suddenly thought he would open it once more.

There were all his letters to her tied in a bundle with pink ribbon. He had never untied them, but did that day. He did not read them, but let one after the other slip through his fingers, and from the postmark could recall where he was when he had written it, and roughly what he had said.

All of a sudden, right at the bottom was a letter in a handwriting not his own, but one that seemed vaguely familiar. He looked at it for a long time before reading it. Was it fair to Sally to read it? He wondered and thought, and then at last drew the letter from its envelope. He turned straight away to the signature, and found it was from Sheila Cameron. He could not imagine what she could have written to Sally about, as Sally had never met her. He read the letter, and as he read, his mouth became set and bitter. He wondered what good she thought she could have done.

Sheila, on seeing his wedding announcement, had written to Sally and told her about him. About their engagement, and why it had been broken off. She ended up smugly, "I thought you ought to know what sort of man Bob is."

So Sally had known, and never said a word. To her it had made no difference. Bob felt very happy, but very lonely. Dear Sally! How sweet she had always been to him! He took out all her photographs. It was nearly a year since he had locked them all away. Now he felt more at peace, and could see her dear face again without it bringing back unhappy memories. He only thought of her as gone away for a short while. She was waiting for him always, and one day he would go to her. He felt very happy as he decorated her room.

Later in the morning Beryl Smithson called round to see him. He was rather surprised, and hurried out to meet her.

"Hullo, Mrs. S.," he called out. "Do forgive me being all dirty like this, but I'm re-furnishing."

She laughed at his appearance. Hot, dusty, and hair on end.

"You certainly look busy, young Bob, but don't worry. I've come round to help you. I remembered last night you said you were going to open up your other rooms, so here I am. A man can't decorate a house—you'll only make a bloody hash of it. You know, 'a woman's touch', etc., that's what this house needs." She laughed again.

They worked till late, and then had a picnic lunch on the lawn, of beer and sandwiches. Bob was too engrossed in his new enthusiasm to want lunch in Mess, and she fell in with his mood. So they sat out under the old banyan tree and ate and talked. Beryl's husband was second-in-command of the battalion so, though Bob did not know it, the Colonel had confided in Smithson, who in turn told his wife, so she knew all about Bob's affairs. Hence the kindly interest.

He felt he liked her, and took her into his confidence. Very self-consciously—very nervously—he showed her Sally's room. There

were her photos, her knick-knacks, her pictures—all just as she had had them at Nurkhet. All she had to do was to come back to him. Her room was ready waiting. Even flowers stood in vases on the small tables and on the mantelpiece. He had arranged them very carefully, remembering her instructions of so long ago—"Not so many in one vase, darling. Just a few. Look! Like this." He could see her again in their bungalow in Nurkhet—so long ago it seemed, and yet so near and close now.

Beryl told him the room was lovely. She had no suggestions to make about it. He was childishly pleased, and they set to work on the remainder of the bungalow. As they worked, he told her he wanted to give a party, and she offered to help. He then told her about Anna and the baby, and asked her if he had better get them back, for he felt he was neglecting the baby Sally.

She asked him why they had ever left, and he told her of Anna's strange behaviour. How she had got engaged to Seymour, come back to Bhawalpur, and then suddenly said that, though she wanted to stay and look after Sally, she must go away, and could not remain with him.

As he spoke Beryl Smithson seemed to be secretly amused about something, and noticing it, he asked what was the joke. She answered him, "Nothing, nothing at all," but

in her heart she thought she knew the solution. To her it seemed so obvious. Poor blind Bob! It was so clear to her that Anna was in love with him. Why else this engagement to Seymour, the sudden breaking-off, and the running away home? However, it was not for her to say anything. It would probably all work out all right in the end. Perhaps if Bob saw her again his eyes would be opened, and to marry Anna was the best thing for both him and Sally. She needed a home, and so did he—perhaps more so.

He gave his house-warming in the form of a cocktail party. He had gone to a lot of trouble getting everything ready beforehand, and when the evening of the party came, the bungalow and garden looked very pretty. He had his wireless playing, and small tables were set here and there from which the view across the river could be enjoyed and the music heard.

Mrs. Smithson had a niece staying with her and brought her along to meet Bob. She was very young, but quite charming. There were also at that time in Bhawalpur two very self-possessed young American girls touring India trying to sell subscriptions to several well-known American magazines. As they were both very pretty, hard-boiled, and extremely smart, it was not difficult for them to persuade young men in out-of-the-way Stations like Bhawalpur, to buy in advance a year's supply

or more of magazines in which they had not, nor ever would have, the slightest interest.

These two sisters by the name of Gray, accepted invitations to dine, ride, dance with everyone, and never failed to plant their wares. In return perhaps a bored kiss was given, but never more. Promises in plenty for future meetings, but they would never return to Bhawalpur, once they left. So much was obvious, and yet here they were at Bob's party, surrounded by men, confident, gay, charming. They would be remembered long after they passed on, for they were leaving next day to visit other Stations throughout India, and then back to America.

For months after they left, every post from overseas brought magazines to subalterns who did not want them. They felt rather foolish to have been so easily mulcted by a pretty face. American enterprise again. No one else would have thought of it, much less risked sending two flappers round the world.

It was now within a couple of months of Christmas, and Bob decided to get Anna and Sally out to Bhawalpur again. He wrote to his mother-in-law first, as he felt that if he approached Anna direct, she would feel she had to come, and would only be miserable again. So he asked Lady Princep to sound her tactfully as to whether she wanted to return or not. Meanwhile he wrote weekly to her as before,

and gave her what news and gossip he had. He was a lot happier now, and took his part in the Station life.

After a few weeks the long-awaited answer came from his mother-in-law. She said that she thought he had better leave things as they were for the present, for, "there is something the matter with Anna, and I cannot find out what it is. She is devoted to Sally, who loves her, and also she says she was very happy at Bhawalpur and is always talking about the bungalow, your parties, the garden and so on. But when there is any mention of returning she gets very silent and miserable about it, and says she can't go back. You had better see what can be done when you next come home on leave. Meanwhile you are not to worry, for Sally is very well and happy, and we love her here. She was two last month and had a party. The children next door came round....."

So that was that. Christmas in the Mess for the first time. Bob did not look forward to it. However, he was down for leave in February for two months, and things might be better after that. He amused himself by writing to various agents and reserving passages on several boats.

# CHAPTER XXXIII

BERYL Smithson's niece was a nice girl but very young, and terribly conscious of it, for she tried to appear as if she knew a lot more than she did and, by an attitude of rather obvious refusing to be shocked at anything, tried to cover up her youth and inexperience. In fact, when in the company of people she did not know very well, or of whom she was rather nervous, she would drink whisky and soda, which she really hated, and say the most outrageous things. Bob liked her, and saw quite a lot of her, and often thought he would like to tell her that she was being silly, but felt she would only hate him for his interference.

These young girls coming out from England did not seem to realise that to men used to, and sick of, the hard-drinking, hard-swearing, promiscuous women, who formed the bulk of Station society, they were, with their freshness and innocence, doubly attractive and like a breath of English countryside.

But "Billie" Smithson was a dear child, and Bob looked forward to his daily ride with her before breakfast, and enjoyed the way she seemed to come to him to settle all the questions in her mind. In her tennis kit she was charm-

ing, and after an hour of hard playing, with her hair awry, her face flushed and eyes sparkling, she seemed ten years old. Bob was very fond of Billie, and they spent a great deal of time together. She was barely eighteen, and he was twenty-nine, thirty in a few months. He looked on her more as a schoolgirl than anything else, and as such enjoyed her youthful company and idiotic prattle.

When at last he did speak to her about drinking and swearing, as they sat out on the Club lawn after a strenuous game of tennis, she did not fly at him as he expected, but replied, surprisingly meekly.

"Of course I'll stop, Bob—if it pleases you."

He should have been warned, but he wasn't.

It was on one of their early morning rides together that Bob first saw that she was restless and often dropped into long silences. He asked her what was troubling her, and was quite unprepared for her answer, for it came in the form of a question.

"Bob," she asked, a frown making her absurdly young-looking face look very intent, "do you think a girl should be a virgin? Would you mind if the woman you married had been with other men?"

Bob was very cross with her, and grew almost pompous in his condemnation of such ideas for what he considered someone barely in

her 'teens'. She quickly flared up also, and defended herself hotly.

"There you are! Selfish and priggish like all men. You've had women—dozens and dozens—don't tell me you haven't. Well, perhaps not dozens—but anyhow, some. Then if you found some wretched girl you liked was not a virgin, you'd be quite content to sleep with her, but not marry her. Oh dear no!"

Bob became extremely angry, and held forth. "For a child of your age this is a most unhealthy conversation, and you should not even try to think about such things. I can only presume you started it all to try and shock me by your so-called, or imagined, 'modern' ideas. Also, my good Billie, I can see you expect me to ask if you are a virgin. Well, I shall not give you the pleasure of 'shocking' me for two reasons. Firstly, it does not concern me in the least, and secondly, I should not believe you whatever you said."

He stopped, well pleased with himself. He considered he had put her in her place, firmly and tactfully. He rode on in silence feeling rather smug. Suddenly he heard an unhappy snort behind him, and looked round in surprise. Billie was crying. He could not tell whether through rage or real feeling. Anyhow, they were now getting into cantonments, and it would look ridiculous for him to be seen riding along with his companion in tears following.

He tried to stop her crying, and to find out what was the matter, but she was very angry with him.

"You're insufferable," she burst out at him. "Just because you've been married and have a child, you think you are so wise and clever. You only look on me as a baby, and now you're so pleased as you've made me cry in front of you, and think that means you've won the argument, and I'm sorry. Well, I'm not. I'm crying as I hate you, and also I'm in a temper and have something in my eye."

"Can I get it out with my hanky?" he asked idiotically.

"Oh, go to Hell! I hate you," she sobbed, and galloped ahead, leaving him to ride back alone.

He did not expect to see her again that day although they had half fixed up to play tennis, so when he was sitting out on the lawn, having his usual evening drink as the sun went down, he was very surprised to hear a self-conscious "Hullo!" at his side. There was Billie, in her short tennis dress, looking very pretty.

"I waited for you—ages," she announced, and sat down on the grass. So they were friends again, and both forgot the morning's quarrel. It was lovely sitting out overlooking the river, and when they wandered down to the

water's edge, they were arm-in-arm and happy once more.

At the river's edge, at the bottom of the garden, had once been a tank which had been allowed to become overgrown with weeds, and which now held very little water. One side of it was built into the bank which overhung it, and the other three jutted out into the water. They sat on the wall, and could very nearly reach the water with their toes, for the Ganges was still swollen from the rains. She suggested to him that they got the tank cleaned out and patched up. It would make a lovely bathing pool all to himself—and 'herself' too, of course, she added. Bob rather liked the idea, and saw it could quite easily be done.

As they talked they sat close together, and without him realising it, his arm was round her waist, and her head resting against his shoulder. He felt her shiver suddenly, and saw it was getting quite dark.

"You're cold, Billie. In that thin dress you must be freezing."

"Yes, I am a bit. I've nothing under it either—see."

She pulled forward the front of her dress and showed him. Without thinking he looked down at her and saw her body dimly in the half light. Her firm young breasts curved softly under their thin covering of silk. She patted

her dress back into place, and smiled up at him. He felt dazed, and his mouth was dry. Her body was all woman, and in his loneliness he wanted her. She was no longer to him the child of the morning, and she had realised it before he did. Her's was the victory not his.

"Do you think I am nice?" she whispered.

He had to put the tip of his tongue between his lips before he could speak.

"My dear, you are lovely. Too lovely for us to be staying out here any longer."

He lifted her to her feet and felt her body trembling against his. He wanted her fiercely. They went back to the bungalow. In the glare of the electric light he felt stronger. It was easier. The very presence of the bearer serving drinks made it so. She looked very lovely.

He took her back to her bungalow. At the gate they said good night. He refused to go in, but left her there and went home. All night he lay awake and thought of her and realised he did not love her. He was fond of her and needed her, and what made it harder was to know, as he did now, that she was his for the taking.

If he could only be strong for a little while longer, it would be all right, for after Christmas she returned to England with Beryl and her husband, who were going on long leave. He decided to avoid her as much as he could

meanwhile. She was young, had all her life before her, and he knew he had no right to take her when he neither loved her nor wanted to marry her. He was certain also that she did not love him. She was only attracted by him, and by the danger of loving a man. She did not really know what she wanted.

So he tried to avoid being alone with her, but it was very difficult. She guessed what he was doing, and knowing he was fighting against her made her want him the more. The making of the swimming pool did not help either, for she insisted that, as it had been her idea, she had the right to help in its carrying out. This drew them together too much for Bob's peace of mind, and he wished it was finished.

When that day came, and they both stood watching it fill, she turned to him.

"We'll bathe tonight," she whispered. "I'll come after dinner."

He protested feebly, but she overruled his objections. He said the Smithsons would never allow it, and she agreed.

"But they won't know, because I've told them you are taking me to the pictures, and as I've seen the film I can easily describe it tomorrow to them. You must be nice, Bob. It's our pool, and I helped make it, so I deserve to use it first with you."

He gave in, and then realised how much he was looking forward to tonight. She went back to the bungalow and waved good-bye to him.

The moon had risen and was hanging over the river when she came. She was dressed in an evening gown of some soft green material which showed off her lovely coppery hair in contrast. They walked down to the pool, her hand in his. She prattled away as they went down the path. He guessed she was talking more to gain confidence than because she had anything to say.

"I couldn't bring my suit, Bobbie. They'd have been suspicious if they'd seen me slipping out with a towel and things. I'll bathe in my *scanties, and you must lend me a hanky or* something to dry with afterwards."

They reached the pool and looked at one another.

"Turn your back, Bobbie, till I'm in," she ordered.

He obediently turned and gazed at nothing away across the Ganges. He was desperately conscious of wrigglings and the soft swish of silk as she undressed behind him. A voice said softly he could turn round.

She stood on the edge of the pool. Her clothes lay in a heap at her feet. In the moonlight she stood straight and white. It played softly over the curves of her young body,

caressing her breasts, her firmly rounded thighs. It showed the soft dark shadows of her loveliness.

He moved slowly towards her. She waited for him motionless, a little smile curled about her lips. He stumbled like a man in a dream and, reaching her, put his arms about her white shoulders.

She whispered to him: "Darling, let's both be like this, then we'll mean such a lot to each other. No one has seen me before. I wanted you to be the first."

She wriggled free of him and dived into the water, calling to him to come in. He threw off his clothes and followed her. They swam together, played silly games, and ducked one another. Then, climbing out, lay under the brilliant moon. He turned over and, propped on his elbows, leaned over her looking into her eyes. They were enormous in the moonlight. She did not speak, but drew him down to her, and gave herself gladly to his embrace.

It seemed so long afterwards that he spoke to her, "Darling, I must take you home."

She demurred. "I want to swim again first." She dived in, and afterwards he dried her with his handkerchief, scolding her for her wilfulness. She laughed at him. She was so happy.

When he left her at her door she clung passionatel yto him. "Bobbie, we belong to each

other now, don't we? Say we do. You must say we do."

He lay alone in bed thinking. What had he done? She had proved so innocent, in spite of her brave words. He had hurt her and she had cried out, and later, as she lay weeping in his arms had confessed she knew and had loved no other. She trusted him so completely. He did not know what to do. He could not hurt her, and to love her was so beautiful.

The next few weeks were the happiest Bob had spent since he had come to Bhawalpur. He saw Billie every day, and they were always together. Tongues began to wag in the Station, and odds were being offered in the Club as to how long it would be before the engagement was announced. The two principals of the little drama were blissfully unaware of the interest they were causing, and went their way quite unconcerned.

Bob was daily growing more and more fond of her, and was restless when she was not with him. She was madly in love herself, and spent most of her days with him. They never repeated their moonlight bathe alone again, as they felt sure of each other, and so long as they were together, did not mind if other people came too. Added to that, Bob was worrying a lot about her, and knew he had no right to her youth and trust. He was more than twelve years older than she was, and she had had no

time to know her own mind. Much as he wanted a home again, and though he was so fond of her, he could not ask her to mother a child now over two years old.

She loved him for the moment, that was obvious, but she might easily change. The voyage home on the boat, the romance of a full-moon at sea, and someone more her own age beside her, all would help her forget her infatuation for him, and since he could not ask her to marry him, he was not going to let himself go on making love to her. He knew he would laugh at himself later on for being a sentimental fool, but he felt better once he made up his mind.

Billie, on the other hand, did not consider it in the same light as he did. All she knew was that she loved him. She had given herself to him, and to her it was natural and lovely to continue giving him all of her. However, she was happy in her possession of him, and so long as they were together and knew they loved each other, she was content to leave things as they were. She knew Bob wanted to marry her, and in her heart was certain one day he would ask her. For the present they were happy.

The night before she sailed for home he wanted to have her to himself. He told her, "I don't want to say good-bye to you in front of a crowd of fools, darling, who'll all be watch-

ing us to try and find out if we are upset. I'll say good-bye here, in our garden, then I can remember you here alone."

She came quite late, in the same frock she had worn the night they became lovers. They bathed again, and as he held her to him and shared her unhappiness, he asked her to marry him.

"Darling, I don't want to let you go like this. You're mine, and I want you always. Will you marry me, sweetheart?"

She smiled up at him. "I've waited so long to hear you ask me that, my dear. So very long."

When they were returning to his bungalow he told her his fears, and she laughed them all away, and he was comforted.

"You see, dearest, I'm so old compared to you. And there is Sally too. It would be so awful if you didn't love her. You must love Sally, as she is all I have."

Billie told him, "You have me now, darling, and you mustn't imagine things. I'll love her. I won't be able to help it as she is yours. I'm so happy, Bobbie. Let's not look ahead and worry."

He promised her he would be home in a few months. They could marry then, but he made her promise him something too.

"If you find you love anyone else, someone not so old as me, you will tell me, Billie? I'd always understand. Promise me ?"

She laughed at his fears. She was so sure of her love, but to please him said, "I promise, silly !"

# CHAPTER XXXIV

A little while after Billie had left Bob suddenly remembered he had not written home for some weeks. He started a letter to his mother-in-law, meaning to tell her he was engaged to be married again. He had got through a few lines, then found he could not find the words to break the news to her. He did not want them to know, and he sat over the writing pad realising he funked telling. Not only that, but he had a queer feeling of unreality with regard to his engagement. He did not know what it was, but he somehow felt he need not tell anyone about it. Least of all, he realised—Anna. He did not want to hurt her.

He had caught himself talking aloud the day before. He was looking at an enlargement of a snapshot he had taken of Billie. She was in her riding kit. A young, straight slip of a girl with untidy bobbed hair. He had taken the photo in his hands and heard himself whispering to her: "Yes, I love you well enough, but you are not for me."

It had startled him at the time, and he had worried over it. He then had come to realise that the thought had not hurt him as it should have, had he really loved her. Perhaps all

along he had known he would never marry her. He felt rather mean and uncomfortable about it all.

He got on with his letter and wrote a vague three or four pages. All padding and no news. At the finish he read it again. He had not mentioned Billie. He took up his pen again and started a letter to her. He looked at her photograph.

"My dear darling, I miss you so dreadfully, and wonder what you are doing now....."

He stopped and thought a while. He missed her right enough. But he did not know how much. He went on with his letter.

When Christmas came, it was to Bob as unlike the Christmases he was used to as anything he had ever imagined could be. If Billie had sailed on the original date the Smithsons had fixed, he could have spent the day with them. He would have liked that. As it was, with their having departed earlier than first arranged, he was doomed to attend the "Ladies' Guest Night" in Mess.

He had felt depressed all day, and the thought of the forced gaiety he had to take part in that evening did nothing to relieve his gloom. His presents had arrived, and from Anna he had received socks, a tie, and some handkerchiefs. She had done them up very prettily in a large red home-made cracker,—and he had forgotten her. As usual he had sent home some

money to his people to buy presents on his behalf, but Anna he had never thought of. He felt terrible, and cabled five pounds to a London store to tell them to write and inform her of this credit in her name. He hoped she would think he had done it long before, but was afraid she would guess the lateness was not the shop's fault but his, and be hurt.

Bob wished his leave would hurry up and come nearer, but it still seemed a long way away. In the monotony of the daily round of Station life he lost all count of time. Mail days still marked off the weeks, but there was no other way of telling the passage of the days.

Billie's letters were getting shorter. He began to feel she wrote because she felt she ought to. They were no longer the spontaneous, affectionate scribbles, pages long, that he got before. She missed two mails in February, and in March came the letter he had been expecting for so long.

He read it through, and it seemed so clear to him. She was frightened. That was obvious in every line of the letter. In India it had all seemed to her so different, and loving him was natural to her. He could see that. It was the journey back that had started her wondering. She had found herself quite ready to flirt with any attractive young man that was paying her court at the time, and it had worried her. Bob smiled as he read on. He

could almost hear the questions she asked herself—"If I loved him, I wouldn't be letting myself be kissed by anyone else."

Then the humdrum, everyday life of the seaside town she came back to. Meeting all her old friends. It all made her visit to India so unreal. She felt it had all been a dream. Bob realised what he had always known in his heart of hearts was right, she was too young to settle down. He could not expect her to.

He wrote her a long letter telling her not to worry. He said that if, when he came home and they met, she still felt she loved him, then they could begin again. In the meantime let them consider the engagement ended.

He stuck down the flap of the envelope. He felt curiously relieved now that what he had waited for so long had come. Now that it had come though, it hurt more than he had expected. He wondered vaguely if it would always be like that. Was he to go on alone for ever? Suddenly he thought of Daphne. He had loved her. More than he had known he could love anyone since Sally died. He wondered where she was now.

He sat a long time in his room. His leave started in a little less than a fortnight. He felt very unexcited about it all. There was so little now to go back for. He wandered slowly towards the Mess.

He did not have much time to think about things between the time he got Billie's letter and the time his leave started, for rioting broke out in the city between the Hindu and Moslem sects. It all happened quite suddenly, and the battalion had to send a company down to help the police restore order.

It all started with the finding in a Hindu temple various portions of a cow held sacred to Hindus. This was laid down to the Moslems, and swift retaliation was taken and their shops burnt and looted. The situation soon became out of hand, and reinforcements were sent from the nearest Station. These were the 2nd battalion of the Carnarvonshire Regiment, and a few armoured cars.

The fighting was very bitter, and in the narrow streets extremely hard to cope with. Brickbats, old pieces of iron, and boiling water would be thrown from the upper stories on to the troops below, who had orders not to retaliate unless absolutely compelled to. So they had a very uncomfortable week, enduring insults and abuse from the very Indians they had come to help. Filth and rubbish were thrown at them, for the natives knew that, so long as they did not actually threaten their lives, the magistrates would never give the order to fire.

Yet had they not been there the loss of life and property would have been enormous.

Time and again wealthy Indian merchants and moneylenders, whose homes were looked on as legitimate loot by the rioters, would come whining to the nearest officer and beg for a sentry to be put in front of his house. They never failed to bring the necessary—as they thought—bribe with them, and it was not uncommon to see one offer bundles of notes to an officer. If refused, they offered more, sobbing and crying for the protection of the "great and benevolent British Raj". Yet these same men were violent Congress agitators and never lost a chance to stir up trouble for the Government. When it came, and grew out of hand, they rushed to the British for help.

When the situation became normal and troops were withdrawn, the same men, once again feeling secure, began their old activities. Unfortunately, in spite of all precautions, some seven or eight persons had been killed when it became imperative for the soldiery to fire in self-defence. This number, compared to the forty and more that the inter-communal rioters had killed, and the hundreds more who would have died had the authorities not stepped in, were in reality negligible, and really showed great credit to the patience of both Indian and British troops.

However, the numbers were exaggerated, and together with added fabrications of rape

and needless brutality, were forwarded to Congress. Questions were asked, and the officers concerned had to write lengthy reports justifying their actions. It was a miserable business, and everyone knew it was a "put-up job", but the Indian Government, weak as always and desperately eager to please, sacrificed its own servants to appease the Indian political agitator.

So after a week of very difficult work and dangerous, two subalterns of the Carnarvons were officially reprimanded, when they should have received official thanks. It was this attitude that made everyone hate the job of troops detailed for riots. They all knew someone was sure to get into trouble for it later, and would have rather any day fought in war than stood by "watching" in an Indian city.

Bob was glad to get away. This last experience showed him India was finished for the British if the present system persisted. Even the troops, themselves Indians, were being troubled in their villages, when on leave, by Congress who, because they served in the Army, would persecute the ignorant sepoy in a hundred different ways. This usually took the form of encouraging other villagers to bring fantastic legal actions against them in reference to the ownership of some grazing land, or perhaps a well. The villager, amply backed with funds, would place his case. The

unfortunate sepoy, with no friends left to him and unable to fight an expensive legal action, would in five cases out of six give up his property.

When he brought his complaint before his commanding officer, then usually the fraud would be exposed, but often he was afraid to do this, as when next on leave, he would be actively persecuted, and in his absence his wife and family attacked.

It was with a sigh of relief that Bob watched Bombay fading beyond the horizon over the stern of the boat.

# CHAPTER XXXV

BOB went down to his cabin but did not stay there long as he was travelling third class and the accommodation was rather cramped. Up on deck he found a chair and, stretching out on it, thought contentedly of three months away from even the sight of a uniform. He wondered if he could persuade his father to take him into his business, but soon gave up that thought. It was more than unlikely. He wished though that he did not have to go back again to the life he had just left.

It was the loneliness of his bungalow which affected him most. He had begun to dread going back to his rooms after dinner in Mess, for he hated their emptiness, and hated there being no one to take any interest in the events of his day, or what he had done. He had loved the welcome he knew was at home at the end of a long day when he was married to Sally. He longed for company.

He was in a pleasant daydream when he heard someone calling his name. He looked all round the deck but could see no one he knew. The voice came again, impatiently.

"Bob, you stupid! Look up!"

He glanced up to where the first class passengers had their sports deck. There was Daphne leaning over the rail, laughing down at him. He tried to ask her a hundred questions, but she interrupted:

"Wait a minute, Bobbie. I'll come down if I can find the way."

She disappeared, and a few minutes later was standing by his side. They moved aft with a couple of deck chairs and sat together.

"What are you doing here?" he asked her.

She told him. "We are on the way home, my husband and I, but he has to break the journey at Port Said to do a job in Cairo, and I go on and wait for him at home. You know, he's going to the Embassy in Paris for two years—then I expect he'll be Consul again in some awful hole. He goes straight there from Cairo when his job is finished, and I join him when he has a house and everything."

Bob asked her, "Won't he be angry if he sees you here with me?"

She laughed. "Darling, you don't know him. He would rather die than be seen in any other class but first, and would never imagine I came down here. Perhaps that is one of the reasons I hate him so. So we are lucky in that way, and I can see you often."

They were very happy, and when she left for her lunch, she promised to be back immediately she finished.

They met every day and spent most of the voyage together. She told him more about her husband, Fred Baxter. He was a brilliant linguist, and crazy over his job in the Diplomatic Service. He had no sense of humour, and was madly jealous of her. He knew she was not in love with him, but that only seemed to make him want her more. He could be extremely vindictive, as could most small men.

Bob never saw him on the boat as Daphne thought it safer thus. She wanted Bob to visit them in Paris, which would be impossible if Fred ever found out he had been on the boat, for he would then guess where Daphne had kept disappearing to. So they continued as they were, with Daphne coming down to the third class whenever she could manage it.

It was not a wonderfully successful arrangement, as both wished to be alone together sometimes, but no privacy was ever possible. Moreover when Bob said "Goodnight" to her each evening, he suffered miseries thinking of her with her husband. Poor Daphne suffered perhaps more, for she loved Bob desperately, and for his sake refused to accept her husband's love-making, and the constant furious scenes to which this gave rise wore her nerves to shreds.

They were very happy when Port Said was reached and Fred Baxter departed. From then onwards the voyage was sheer happiness for Daphne and Bob. He would go to her cabin

every day and stay all night. They did not become lovers in the complete sense, for both Daphne and he told each other the same thing. "If we can't belong to each other completely, it is better to go on as we are." They could not share their love. It became more difficult as time went on, and soon they felt ill with longing for each other, but still tried to struggle on.

When they reached Marseilles Bob should have disembarked and gone across home overland, but Daphne, who was going all the way round by sea, begged him to stay, so he paid the little extra, and remained. He asked her would it help at all, and was it any use going on like that?

"You see, darling, we can't go on for ever like this. Hadn't I better get off here? Our nerves are getting to breaking point, and we are quarrelling so often now."

She wept and begged him to stay. It was true they had begun quarrelling, and both had hurt each other. It was obvious they could not go on as before, and they both realised it. That night they became lovers, and found peace.

They both were so alike and now lived in heaven. A silly imagined heaven of their own making. They grew to know what the other was thinking, and when they reached England, disappeared to a little hotel in Ashdown Forest together. Here they remained for a week

together before Daphne had to leave for her parents-in-law's home. She did not dare stay longer.

The night before she left, Bob woke to hear her crying quietly at his side. She was desperate. She sobbed brokenly in his arms.

"I can't go back to him—oh, Bobbie darling, don't let me go."

He could do nothing. Nor could she. The children stood between any hope of marriage.

They parted next day, broken-hearted. He went straight up to London where the Princeps, Anna, and Sally were waiting for him. He did not know how to explain his long delay in arrival. In the end he did not try. They saw he was worried and asked no questions.

He had not realised till then how glad he was to be back with them again. This was the nearest place he had to a home, and here he was always welcome. Sally had not the vaguest idea of who he was, but repeated stolidly and obediently that he was "Daddy". She had grown a lot since he last saw her, and was a pretty little thing now. Anna was entirely wrapped up in her and anxious to hear what Bob had to say about her.

Strangely enough it was she who guessed what was the matter with Bob, and though she had never seen Daphne or heard him mention another woman, she knew he was in love with

someone. He had letters from her every day, and in his turn wrote to her. He met her twice in London before she left for Paris to join Fred, and each time he returned home, Anna knew he had been seeing his lover, his distrait and unhappy manner gave him away. She never said anything, but suffered silently. If he married again, she knew she would have to go.

He never guessed she knew about Daphne. Her manner towards him was just the same. She still did all the little extra jobs for him she used to in Bhawalpur, and he, taking it all for granted, never even noticed. No longer were his socks, when holed, drawn together in a big lump of string by his bearer's efforts. Nor did he find a lost button replaced on a coat by one of completely different size, shape, and colour from all the rest. She looked after his welfare, and asked for no thanks.

One day they all went down to see his sister and John Spencer at their little house on the river near Windsor. Marriage had softened Mary, and for the first time since they had played together as children, she and her brother felt the old affection for each other and had a happy day. She was proud of her house and devoted to John. The only thing she told Bob she envied him was Sally. She wanted a baby and so did John, but so far did not appear ever to be going to have a child.

Sally loved the garden, and to her delight found an old swing tied to the branches of an

apple tree. Anna had to spend long hours pushing her. Even Mary had to help. At the end of the day Sally howled and said she wanted to stay. There was no garden or swing at home, she yelled, and she'd stay with Auntie Mary. She was pacified with a promise of coming again in a short time. Mary was glad, and wanted her to stay, so a week-end was arranged.

When they got back to London Sally was asleep, and barely woke even while being undressed and put to bed. Bob watched Anna looking after her, and thought what a dear she was.

"It has been a happy day, hasn't it, Anna?" he asked.

"Yes, Bob, and your sister is happier now too."

"And you, Anna? Don't you ever want to go away?".

"No. I won't leave you.....yet."

They went down to dinner. The Princeps were waiting for them and wanted to hear all about their day with Mary. His mother-in-law was very glad they were on better terms, and told Bob he must go and stay with his parents. He promised he would.

They all sat down to dinner, and talked the usual idle chatter that hardly needed listening to. It was all very comfortable and

pleasant. The old General was telling Anna about his golf. He was very fond of her, and she spoilt him dreadfully. Bob talked to his mother-in-law.

The following week he took Sally down to see his parents. They had aged a lot in the last year and seemed lonelier than before. His mother had never got used to losing Mary, and now that she no longer went down to Hove every week-end, the old house had become a lonely, silent place.

Bob's little niece was still there and had grown into a wide-eyed, solemn little creature, for though she met other children in term-time, she seldom met any during the holidays, and through living with old people, was getting to be a funny little old-fashioned child.

She took to Sally and led her off into the garden and, with a great air of importance, showed her round and played with her, while Bob stayed talking to his parents. They wanted him to stay a few days, and he promised he would come down for a week before he left again. This pleased them for, though they had not got on very well together before when Bob lived with them, and though they would quite likely quarrel again, it had hurt them to see him living with his wife's parents, for in their own way they were fond of him, and he was their only son. Bob too was glad, for he, in a queer, exasperated way, was fond of them also.

He left Hove after tea and reached his London home in good time for Sally's supper and bed, for which he got 'good marks' from Anna. He found a letter from Daphne waiting for him on the hall table, and took it up to his room to read. She had been in Paris nearly a week, but this was her first letter since arrival. She sounded miserably unhappy, and quite hysterical, and asked him to go over as soon as possible. He read the letter again, and felt ill with worry for her.

"I am still yours, darling, completely yours, but it is dreadful living with him, for he has guessed I love someone else. Sometimes I feel I can't go on. Please come to me, for with you near I can bear anything."

She went on to tell him they could spend all day together, for Fred worked at the Embassy till late—that she would have the use of the car—that they could go to garden parties, official functions, dances. He was to bring his morning suit, his tails—everything. They were going to have a marvellous time.

Bob folded the letter. It sounded almost too wonderful. He would be with Daphne again this time tomorrow. He was too excited and happy to query all her suggestions, or if it would be as easy as she said to spend so much time together. He packed feverishly before dinner, and got his clothes into two suitcases. He then telephoned Imperial Airways and booked a

seat in the midday plane. All that remained was to announce his departure. He dreaded this, and found it worse than he had expected.

Dinner was an unhappy meal. He felt mean, and hated his lies. He knew he had hurt them going away again on top of arriving late. He did not dare look at Anna. He could not bear the bewildered look in her eyes. She knew he was going to meet Daphne, but said nothing except to ask when he would be back, and to remind him of his promise to stay with his parents.

"Oh, I'll only be away about two days," said Bob.

He did not believe this, but felt it would be easier to write from Paris and say he was staying on, than to announce it then. He felt very mean and was glad when dinner ended and he could get away.

# CHAPTER XXXVI

WHEN he arrived in Paris he booked a room at a small pension in a quiet street behind the Rivoli. It was quite a cheap little place, but he was finding his cash running short, and it was all he could afford.

He rang up Daphne's number immediately and found she was out. He 'phoned again three times before dinner but got no answer. He could not understand it, for she knew he had arrived as he wired from London. Surely she would have stayed in for him. He did not dare go out himself in case she arrived, so waited in his room all afternoon.

At last he 'phoned again, and her voice answered him. "I'm so sorry, darling, I wasn't in all day, but I had to go to a garden party with Fred. I couldn't get out of it. When can we meet? Not tonight, dearest, as I have a small dinner party. I'll come round to your pension in the morning early, and we can have all day together. I'm so happy you're here, sweetheart."

Bob put down the receiver. He had a queer cold feeling of disappointment in his heart. This was so different from the welcome

he had imagined and pictured as he travelled over. He went out and dined at a small café, and then returned to an early bed.

Next morning he was up by nine and had had breakfast. He then sat at his window and watched for Daphne. At eleven she still had not come, and he did not dare telephone, as perhaps the delay meant Fred had not gone to office, in which case to 'phone might make things awkward for her. He waited.

At midday she arrived, breathless, apologetic.

"Darling, I couldn't get the car, so I had to come by tram, so I'm late. I'm so sorry, darling."

Bob kissed her, and wondered vaguely how long she could stay. He asked her where they would lunch, and she was very emphatic.

"Darling, I can't stay out for lunch! Fred would be bound to be suspicious, as I never lunch out without him."

Bob asked when he would see her again, and she was very contrite, and explained that she had had to go on accepting her social invitations or it would have looked queer, so they would not have so much time together as they thought.

He asked her, "But Daphne, can't I come to some of the more public ones? You told me

to bring my morning coat and things, and I have. Couldn't I come to one of the dances? I must see you, darling. This is awful."

She was terrified. "Oh no, no, no! Bob darling, I daren't let Fred know you are in Paris. Someone has told him vague things about my having a 'boy friend' on the boat, and if he sees you, he'll guess it is you. Oh darling I'm sorry." She wept and clung to him. "This is awful for you sitting in this little pension all day waiting for me!"

She left him, and Bob wandered around the streets all day. He knew no one, and was wretched. For three days he stood it as best he could, seeing her for a brief hour each morning. She was utterly miserable, for the thought of him sitting waiting for her in his little hotel haunted her wherever she was, and she could not bear his unhappiness.

In the end they decided it was useless to go on. She came to the aerodrome with him when he left. She wept bitterly and waved a crumpled hanky at him. It was all over.

They were all very surprised to see him back again so soon, and very pleased, for they had thought he would be away at least a week. When questioned he tried to tell them that he had always said he would be home again in a couple of days, but though his mother-in-law and the old General may have believed him, he did not fool Anna for a moment.

She made no comment, but went up to his room to unpack for him. He followed slowly, and watched her from his bed. She opened the suitcase containing his dress clothes and morning suit.

"Why, Bob," she exclaimed. "This hasn't ever been unpacked even. Didn't you need them in Paris?"

He looked at her, and turned away before he spoke.

"I thought I would use them, but found I was wrong."

She bent over the box. "Poor Bob! It must have hurt a lot."

He didn't answer, but left the room.

There were still five weeks of his leave left, and as the weather was glorious, he decided to spend a week with his people, and then take a cottage near the sea for the last month. He told Anna his plans, and she approved.

They started off immediately, and arrived in Hove on a hot bright May morning. The sea front was crowded, and many people were bathing. Sally said she wanted to paddle, so after lunch the three of them proceeded to the beach and spent a lazy afternoon lying on the sands.

Bob's parents did not want him to leave them before he sailed, so he compromised by

taking a small service flat in Hove, quite near their house. In this way they could be together part of every day, and so all were content.

As the time drew near to sail Bob dreaded going back more and more. He was happy where he was with his baby and Anna, whereas all he had to go back to was an empty bungalow, servants to whom he meant nothing more than a source of income, people to whom he was, and meant, nothing.

He was rather highly strung and emotional in some ways, and he had begun to dread his lonely evenings in Bhawalpur. He used to picture the other married officers returning hot and tired after a bad day, to be welcomed by their wives, asked what sort of a day it had been, fussed over a little and spoilt. He missed Sally terribly at such times.

As the days passed he realised it was going to be more difficult than he thought. He would miss the long hours of peace on the beach with Sally playing by herself and Anna looking so solemn and sweet nearby.

One day he turned over on his elbows as he lay on the sand and asked her "Anna, if I take Sally back with me, will you come too?"

She was terribly upset. "No, no, Bob, I can't again. Please let her stay here."

He asked her why she wouldn't come, but she told him nothing.

"You liked Bhawalpur, didn't you, Anna? Weren't you happy there?"

"I loved it. I was perfectly happy. I just couldn't go on like that though. Please don't ask me why. If you take Sally, then I lose her. She is your baby. I can't come with you." She was almost in tears.

Later in the day, as he thought over his return to India, he felt very sorry to have upset Anna so much after all she had done for the child. He wished she would change her mind and come out with him, but he saw she would not. Suddenly he decided to let things go on as they were, and went along to her room to tell her he would be travelling alone.

He knocked at her door. There was no answer, so he opened it and stepped inside. Anna was stretched out asleep on top of her bed. He tiptoed across and looked down at her. She had been crying and the tears had left marks down her cheeks. She looked very young and unhappy lying there. He stroked her hair and she smiled in her sleep. He felt a queer tightening of his heart.

She woke suddenly and gazed wide-eyed at him. He started to tell her she needn't worry any more, and sat beside her stroking

her hand. They began to argue, for she said it was selfish of her to try to keep his baby, and he tried to comfort her. She began to cry again, and through her sobs, he heard her say:

"I'm so unhappy—so dreadfully unhappy and lonely."

He held her close and patted her and soothed her. He turned her wet face up to his, and kissed her eyes. She held to him tightly. He didn't want to leave her behind.

"Anna darling," he whispered, "will you marry me and come back with me?"

"Oh Bob, I want to. You know I've always loved you, but I couldn't go back like I was before."

He kissed her again, and then she jumped up and said she must tidy as she looked awful. He watched her dabbing with powder and scent. She was very sweet, he thought.

* * *

It was evening in Bhawalpur. The sun had dropped below the horizon. A soft breeze came from over the river. The garden was a mass of blooms whose scent lay heavily in the twilight air. The golden mohur trees near the edge of the water were a blaze of scarlet and flame. The rains were over and Bob and Anna

were sitting together looking over the Ganges. Sally's cot was on the verandah.

It was very peaceful out there in the twilight. A dog barked far away, a drum throbbed. The new moon appeared.

"Look, darling—wish," said Anna.

He looked at her and smiled. "I have nothing left to wish for, dearest."

They walked down to the river bank together. Baldur watched them from where he lay, and flapped his tail once, lazily. They didn't need him there, he decided, and yawned before dropping off again.